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THE
BORDERERS:

A TALE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF
"THE SPY," "THE RED ROVER," "THE PRAIRIE,"
&c. &c. &c.

"But she is dead to him, to all ;
Her lute hangs silent on the wall,
And on the stairs, and at the door,
Her fairy step is heard no more."

ROGERS.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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THE BORDERERS;

OR,

THE WEPT OF WISH-TON-WISH.

CHAPTER I.

“ I will watch to-night ;
Perchance 'twill walk again.”

Hamlet.

“ MAY not this be a warning given in mercy?” the Puritan, at all times disposed to yield credit to supernatural manifestations of the care of Providence, demanded, with a solemnity that did not fail to produce its impres-

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sion on most of his auditors. "The history of our colonies is full of the evidences of these merciful interpositions."

"We will thus consider it," returned the stranger, to whom the question seemed more particularly addressed. "The first measure shall be to seek out the danger to which it points. Let the youth they call Dudley, give me the aid of his powerful frame and manly courage; then trust the discovery of the meaning of these frequent speakings of the conch to me."

"Surely, Submission, thou wilt not again be the first to go forth!" exclaimed Mark, in a surprise that was equally manifested by Content and Ruth, the latter of whom pressed her little image to her side, as though the bare proposal presented a powerful picture of supernatural danger. "'Twill be well to think maturely on the step ere thou runnest the hazard of such an adventure."

"Better it should be I," said Content, "who

am accustomed to forest signs, and all the usual testimonials of the presence of those who may wish us harm."

"No," said he, who for the first time had been called 'Submission,' a name that savoured of the religious enthusiasm of the times, and which might have been adopted as an open avowal of his readiness to bow beneath some peculiar dispensation of Providence; "this service shall be mine. Thou art both husband and father; and many are there who look to thy safety as to their rock of earthly support and comfort, while neither kindred, nor--but we will not speak of things foreign to our purpose. Thou knowest, Mark Heathcote, that peril and I are no strangers. There is little need to bid me be prudent. Come, bold woodsman, shoulder thy musket, and be ready to do credit to thy manhood, should there be reason to prove it."

"And why not Reuben Ring?" said a hurried female voice, that all knew to proceed from the

lips of the sister of the youth just named. "He is quick of eye and ready of hand, in trials like these; would it not be well to succour thy party with such aid?"

"Peace, girl," meekly observed Ruth. "This matter is already in the ordering of one used to command; there needeth no counsel from thy short experience."

Faith shrunk back abashed, the flush which had mantled over her brown cheek deepening to a tint like that of blood.

Submission (we use the appellation in the absence of all others) fastened a searching glance for a single moment on the countenance of the girl, and then, as if his attention had not been devoted from the principal subject in hand, he rejoined, coolly—

"We go as scouts, and observers of that which may hereafter call for the ready assistance of this youth; but numbers would expose us to observation without adding to our usefulness. And yet," he added, arresting his footstep,

which was already turned towards the door, and looking earnestly and long at the Indian boy, "perhaps there standeth one who might much enlighten us, would he but speak!"

This remark drew every eye on the person of the captive. The lad stood the scrutiny with the undismayed and immoveable composure of his race. But though his eye met the looks of those around him haughtily and in pride, it was not gleaming with any of that stern defiance which had so often been known to glitter in his glances, when he had reason to think that his fortunes or his person was the subject of the peculiar observation of those with whom he dwelt. On the contrary, the expression of his dark visage was that rather of amity than of hatred, and there was a moment when the look he cast upon Ruth and her offspring was visibly touched with a feeling of concern. A glance, charged with such a meaning, could not escape the quick-sighted vigilance of a mother.

"The child hath proved himself worthy to

be trusted," she said ; " and in the name of Him who looketh into and knoweth all hearts, let him once more go forth."

Her lips became sealed, for again the conch announced the seeming impatience of those without to be admitted. The full tones of the shell thrilled on the nerves of the listeners, as though they proclaimed the coming of some great and fearful judgment.

In the midst of these often-repeated and mysterious sounds, Submission alone seemed calm and unmoved. Turning his look from the countenance of the boy, whose head had dropped upon his breast as the last notes of the conch rang among the buildings, he motioned hurriedly to Dudley to follow, and left the place.

There was, in good truth, that in the secluded situation of the valley, the darkness of the hour, and the nature of the several interruptions, which might readily awaken deep concern in the breasts of men as firm even as those

who now issued into the open air, in quest of the solution of doubts that were becoming intensely painful. The stranger, or Submission, as we may in future have frequent occasion to call him, led the way in silence to a point of the eminence without the buildings, where the eye might overlook the palisades that hedged the sides of the acclivity, and command a view beyond of all that the dusky and imperfect light would reveal.

It was a scene that required familiarity with a border life to be looked on, at any moment, with indifference. The broad, nearly interminable, and seemingly trackless forest, lay about them, bounding the view to the narrow limits of the valley, as though it were some straitened oasis amidst an ocean of wilderness. Within the boundaries of the cleared land, objects were less indistinct; though even those nearest and most known were now seen only in the confused and gloomy outlines of night.

Across this dim prospect, Submission and his companion gazed long and cautiously.

“There is nought but motionless stumps, and fences loaded with snow,” said the former, when his eye had roamed over the whole circuit of the view, which lay on the side of the valley where they stood. “We must go forth, that we look nearer to the fields.”

“Thither then is the postern,” said Dudley, observing that the other took a direction opposite to that which led to the gate. But a gesture of authority induced him at the next instant to restrain his voice, and to follow whither his companion chose to lead the way.

The stranger made a circuit of half the hill ere he descended to the palisadoes, at a point where lay long and massive piles of wood, which had been collected for the fuel of the family. This spot was one that overlooked the steepest acclivity of the eminence, which was in itself, just there, so difficult of ascent, as to

render the provision of the pickets far less necessary than in its more even faces. Still no useful precaution, for the security of the family, had been neglected, even at this strong point of the works. The piles of wood were laid at such a distance from the pickets as to afford no facilities for scaling them; while, on the other hand, they formed platforms and breast-works, that might have greatly added to the safety of those who should be required to defend this portion of the fortress. Taking his way directly amid the parallel piles, the stranger descended rapidly through the whole of their mazes, until he had reached the open space between the outer of the rows and the palisadoes, a space that was warily left too wide to be passed by the leap of man.

“ ’Tis many a day since foot of mine has been in this spot,” said Eben Dudley, feeling his way along a path that his companion threaded without any apparent hesitation. “ My own hand laid this outer pile, some

winters since, and certain am I, that from that hour to this, man hath not touched a billet of the wood ; and yet, for one who hath come from over sea, it would appear that thou hast no great difficulty in making way among the narrow lanes !”

“ He that hath sight may well choose between air and beechen logs,” returned the other, stopping at the palisadoes, and in a place that was concealed from any prying eyes within the works, by triple and quadruple barriers of wood. Feeling in his girdle, he then drew forth something which Dudley was not long in discovering to be a key. While the latter, aided by the little light that fell from the heavens, was endeavouring to make the most of his eyes, Submission applied the instrument to a lock that was artfully sunk in one of the timbers, at the height of a man’s breast from the ground, and giving a couple of vigorous turns, a piece of the palisado, some half a fathom long, yielded on a powerful hinge below, and falling,

made an opening sufficiently large for the passage of a human body.

“Here is a sally-port ready provided for our sortie,” the stranger coolly observed, motioning to the other to precede him. When Dudley had passed, his companion followed, and the opening was then carefully closed and locked.

“Now is all fast again, and we are in the fields without raising alarm to any of mortal birth, at least,” continued the guide, thrusting a hand into the folds of his doublet, as if to feel for a weapon, and preparing to descend the difficult declivity which still lay between him and the base of the hill. Eben Dudley hesitated to follow. The interview with the traveller in the mountains occurred to his heated imagination, and the visions of a prestigious agency revived with all their original force. The whole manner and the mysterious character of his companion was little likely to reassure a mind disturbed with such images.

“There is a rumour going in the colony,”

muttered the borderer, "that the invisibles are permitted for a time to work their evil, and it may well happen that some of their ungodly members shall journey to the Wish-Ton-Wish, in lack of better employment."

"Thou sayest truly," replied the stranger ; "but the power that allows of their wicked torments may have seen fit to provide an agent of its own, to defeat their subtleties. We will now draw nearer to the gate, in order that an eye may be kept on their malicious designs."

Submission spoke with gravity, and not without a certain manner of solemnity. Dudley yielded, though with a divided and a disturbed mind, to his suggestion. Still he followed in the footsteps of the stranger, with a caution that might well have eluded the vigilance of any agency short of that which drew its means of information from sources deeper than any of human power.

When the two watchers had found a secret and suitable place, not far from the postern,

they disposed themselves in silence to await the result. The outbuildings lay in deep quiet, not a sound of any sort arising from all of the many tenants they were known to contain. The lines of ragged fences; the blackened stumps capped with little pyramids of snow; the taller and sometimes suspiciously looking stubs; an insulated tree, and, finally, the broad border of forest, were alike motionless, gloomy, and clothed in the doubtful forms of night. Still the space around the well-secured and trebly-barred postern was vacant. A sheet of spotless snow served as a background, that would have been sure to betray the presence of any object passing over its surface. Even the conch might be seen suspended from one of the timbers, as mute and inoffensive as the hour when it had been washed by the waves on the sands of the sea-shore.

“Here will we watch for the coming of the stranger, be he commissioned by the powers of air, or be he one sent on an errand of earth,”

whispered Submission, preparing his arms for immediate use, and disposing of his person, at the same time, in a manner most convenient to endure the weariness of a patient watch.

“I would my mind were at ease, on the question of right-doing in dealing harm to one who disturbs the quiet of a border family,” said Dudley, in a tone sufficiently repressed for caution; “it may be found prudent to strike the first blow, should one like an over-sea gallant, after all, be inclined to trouble us at this hour.”

“In that strait thou wilt do well to give little heed to the order of the offences,” gloomily returned the other. “Should another messenger of England appear—”

He paused, for a note of the conch was heard rising gradually on the air, until the whole of the wide valley was filled with its rich and melancholy sound.

“Lip of man is not at the shell!” exclaimed the stranger, who, like Dudley, had made a

forward movement towards the postern, the instant the blast reached his ear, and who, like Dudley, recoiled, in an amazement that even his practised self-command could not conceal, as he undeniably perceived the truth of that his speech affirmed. "This exceedeth all former instances of marvellous visitations!"

"It is vain to pretend to raise the feeble nature of man to the level of things coming from the invisible world," returned the woodsman at his side. "In such a strait it is seemly that sinful men should withdraw to the dwellings, where we may sustain our feebleness by the spiritual strivings of the captain."

To this discreet proposal the stranger raised no objection. Without taking the time necessary to effect their retreat with the precaution that had been observed in their advance, the two adventurers quickly found themselves at the secret entrance, through which they had so lately issued.

"Enter," said the stranger, lowering the piece

of the palisado, for the passage of his companion, "enter of a Heaven's sake! for it is truly meet that we assemble all our spiritual succour."

Dudley was in the act of complying, when a dark line, accompanied by a low rushing sound, cut the air between his head and that of his companion. At the next instant a flint-headed arrow quivered in the timber.

"The heathen!" shouted the borderer, recovering all his manhood as the familiar danger became apparent, and throwing back a stream of fire in the direction from which the treacherous missile had come. "To the palisadoes, men! the bloody heathen is upon us!"

"The heathen!"—echoed the stranger, in a deep, steady, commanding voice, that had evidently often raised the warning in scenes of even greater emergency, and levelling a pistol, which brought a dark form that was gliding across the snow, to one knee,—“the heathen! the bloody heathen is upon us!”

As if both assailants and assailed paused, one moment of profound stillness succeeded this fierce interruption of the quiet of the night. Then the cries of the two adventurers were answered by a burst of yells from a wide circle, that nearly environed the hill. At the same moment, each dark object in the fields, gave up a human form. The shouts were followed by a cloud of arrows, that rendered further delay without the cover of the palisadoes, eminently hazardous. Dudley entered, but the passage of the stranger would have been cut off, by a leaping, whooping band that pressed fiercely on his rear, had not a broad sheet of flame, glancing from the hill directly in their swarthy and grim countenances, driven the assailants back upon their own footsteps. In another moment, the bolts of the lock were passed, and the two fugitives were in safety behind the ponderous piles of wood.

CHAPTER II.

“There need no ghost, my lord, come from the grave,
To tell us this.”

Hamlet.

ALTHOUGH the minds of most, if not of all the inmates of the Wish-Ton-Wish had been so powerfully exercised that night, with a belief that the powers of the invisible world were about to be let loose upon them, the danger had now presented itself in a shape too palpable to admit of further doubt. The cry of ‘the heathen!’ had been raised from every lip;

even the daughter and élève of Ruth repeated it, as they fled wailing through the buildings, and, for a moment, terror and surprise appeared to involve the assailed in inextricable confusion. But the promptitude of the young men in rushing to the rescue, with the steadiness of Content, soon restored order. Even the females assumed at least the semblance of composure ; the family having been too long trained to meet the exigencies of such an emergency to be thrown entirely off its guard, for more than the first and the most appalling moments of the alarm.

The effect of the sudden repulse was such as all experience had taught the colonists to expect in their Indian warfare. The uproar of the onset ceased as abruptly as it had commenced ; and a calmness so tranquil and a stillness so profound succeeded, that one who had for the first time witnessed such a scene might readily have fancied it the effects of some wild and fearful illusion.

During these moments of general and deep

silence, the two adventurers, whose retreat had probably hastened the assault, by offering the temptation of an easy passage within the works, left the cover of the piles of wood, and ascended the hill to the place where Dudley knew Content was to be posted, in the event of a summons to the defences.

“ Unless much inquiry hath deceived me in the nature of the heathen’s craftiness,” said the stranger, “ we shall have breathing time, ere the onset be renewed. The experience of a soldier bids me say that prudence now urges us to look into the number and position of our foes, that we may order our resistance with better understanding of their force.”

“ In what manner of way may this be done ? Thou seest nought about us but the quiet and the darkness of night. Speak of the number of our enemies we cannot ; and sally forth we may not, without certain destruction to all who quit the palisadoes.”

“ Thou forgettest that we have a hostage

in the boy; he may be turned to some advantage, if our power over his person be used with discretion."

"I doubt that we deceive ourselves with a hope that is vain," returned Content, leading the way as he spoke, however, towards the court which communicated with the principal dwelling. "I have closely studied the eye of that lad, since his unaccountable entrance within the works, and little do I find there that should teach us to expect confidence. It will be happy if some secret understanding with those without has not aided him in passing the palisadoes, and that he prove not a dangerous spy on our force and movements."

"In regard to that he hath entered the dwelling without sound of conch or aid of posteru, be not disturbed," returned the stranger, with composure. "Were it fitting, this mystery might be of easy explanation; but it may truly need all our sagacity to discover whether he hath connection with our foes. The mind of

a native does not give up its secrets like the surface of a vanity-feeding mirror."

The stranger spoke like a man who wrapped a portion of his thoughts in reserve; and his companion listened as one who comprehended more than it might be seemly or discreet to betray. With this secret and yet equivocal understanding of each other's meaning, they entered the dwelling, and soon found themselves in the presence of those they sought.

The constant danger of their situation had compelled the family to bring themselves within the habits of a methodical and severely regulated order of defence. Duties were assigned, in the event of alarm, to the feeblest bodies and the faintest hearts; and during the moments which preceded the visit of her husband, Ruth had been endeavouring to commit to her female subordinates the several necessary charges that usage, and more particularly the emergency of the hour, appeared so imperiously to require.

"Hasten, Charity, to the block," she said,

“ and look into the condition of the buckets and the ladders, that, should the heathen drive us to its shelter, provision of water and means of retreat be not wanting in our extremity ; and hie thee, Faith, into the upper apartments, to see that no lights may direct their murderous aim at any in the chambers. Thoughts come tardily when the arrow or the bullet hath already taken its flight. And now that the first assault is over, Mark, and we may hope to meet the wiles of the enemy by some prudence of our own, thou mayest go forth to thy father. It would have been tempting Providence too rashly, hadst thou rushed, unbidden and uninformed, into the first hurry of the danger. Come hither, child, and receive the blessing and prayers of thy mother ; after which thou shalt, with better trust in Providence, place thy young person among the combatants, in the hope of victory. Remember that thou art now of an age to do justice to thy name and origin ; and yet art thou of years too tender

to be foremost in speech, and far less in action, on such a night as this."

A momentary flush, that only served to render the succeeding paleness more obvious, passed across the brow of the mother. She stooped and imprinted a kiss on the forehead of the impatient boy, who scarcely waited to receive this act of tenderness ere he hurried to place himself in the ranks of her defenders.

"And now," said Ruth, slowly turning her eye from the door by which the lad had disappeared, and speaking with a sort of unnatural composure, "and now will we look to the safety of those who can be of but little service, except as sentinels to sound the alarm. When thou art certain, Faith, that no neglected light is in the rooms above, take the children to the secret chamber; thence they may look upon the fields without danger from any chance direction of the savages' aim. Thou knowest, Ruth, my frequent teaching in this matter; let no sounds of alarm nor frightful whoopings of the people

without, cause thee to quit the spot ; since thou wilt there be safer even than in the block, against which many missiles will doubtless be driven, on account of its seeming air of strength. Timely notice shall be given of the change, should we seek its security. Thou wilt descend, only, shouldst thou see enemies scaling the palisadoes on the side which overhangs the stream, since there have we the fewest eyes to watch their movements. Remember that on the side of the outbuildings and of the fields, our force is chiefly posted ; there can be less reason therefore that thou shouldst expose thy lives by endeavouring to look too curiously into that which passeth in the fields. Go, my children, and a heavenly Providence prove thy guardian."

Ruth stooped to kiss the cheek that her daughter offered to the salute. The embrace was then given to the other child, who was in truth scarcely less near her heart, being the orphan daughter of one who had been as a sister

in her affections. But unlike the kiss she had impressed on the forehead of Mark, the present embraces were hasty, and evidently awakened less intense emotion. She had committed the boy to a known and positive danger ; but, under the semblance of some usefulness, she sent the others to a place believed to be even less exposed, so long as the enemy could be kept without the works, than the citadel itself. Still a feeling of deep and maternal tenderness came over her mind as her daughter retired, and yielding to its sudden impulse, she recalled the girl to her side.

“Thou wilt repeat the prayer for especial protection against the dangers of the wilderness,” she solemnly continued. “In thy asking, fail not to remember him to whom thou owest being, and who now exposeth life, that we may be safe. Thou knowest the Christian’s rock ; place thy faith on its foundation.”

“And they who seek to kill us,” demanded

the well-instructed child ; “ are they too of the number of those for whom he died ? ”

“ It may not be doubted, though the manner of the dispensation be so mysterious ! Barbarians in their habits, and ruthless in their enmities, they are creatures of our nature, and equally objects of his care.”

Flaxen locks, that half covered a forehead and face, across which ran the most delicate tracery of veins, added lustre to a skin as spotlessly fair as if the warm breezes of that latitude had never fanned the countenance of the girl. Through this maze of ringlets, the child turned her full, clear, blue eyes, bending her looks in wonder and in fear on the dark visage of the captive Indian youth, who at that moment was to her a subject of secret horror. Unconscious of the interest he excited, the lad stood calm, haughty, and seemingly unobservant, cautious to let no sign of weakness or of concern escape him in this scene of womanly emotion.

“ Mother,” whispered the still wondering

child, "may we not let him go into the forest? I do not love to—"

"This is no time for speech. Go to thy hiding place, my child, and remember both thy askings and the cautions I have named. Go, and heavenly care protect thy innocent head!"

Ruth again stooped, and bowing her face until the features were lost in the rich tresses of her daughter, a moment 'passed, during which there was an eloquent silence. When she arose, a tear glistened on the cheek of the child. The latter had received the embrace more in apathy than in concern; and now, when led towards the upper rooms, she moved from the presence of her mother, it was with an eye that never bent its rivetted gaze from the features of the young Indian, until the intervening walls hid him entirely from her sight.

"Thou hast been thoughtful and like thyself, my good Ruth," said Content, who at that moment entered, and who rewarded the self-

command of his wife by a look of the kindest approbation. "The youths have not been more prompt in meeting the foe at the stockades than thy maidens in looking to their less hardy duties. All is again quiet without; and we come now rather for consultation than for any purposes of strife."

"Then must we summon our father from his post at the artillery in the block."

"It is not needful," interrupted the stranger. "Time presses, for this calm may be too shortly succeeded by a tempest that all our power shall not quell. Bring forth the captive."

Content signed to the boy to approach, and when he was in reach of his hand, he placed him full before the stranger.

"I know not thy name, nor yet even that of thy people," commenced the latter, after a long pause, in which he seemed to study deeply the countenance of the lad; "but certain am I, though a more wicked spirit may still be strug-

gling for the mastery in thy wild mind, that nobleness of feeling is no stranger to thy bosom. Speak; hast thou aught to impart concerning the danger that besets this family? I have learned much this night from thy manner, but to be clearly understood, it is now time that thou shouldst speak in words."

The youth kept his eye fastened on that of the speaker, until the other had ended, and then he bent it slowly, but with searching observation, on the anxious countenance of Ruth. It seemed as if he balanced between his pride and his sympathies. The latter prevailed, for, conquering the deep reluctance of an Indian, he spoke openly, and for the first time, since his captivity, in the language of the hated race.

"I hear the whoops of warriors," was his calm answer. "Have the ears of the pale men been shut?"

"Thou hast spoken with the young men of thy tribe in the forest, and thou hadst knowledge of this onset?"

The youth made no reply, though the keen look of his interrogator was met steadily, and without fear. Perceiving that he had demanded more than would be answered, the stranger changed his mode of investigation, masking his inquiries with a little more of artifice.

“It may not be that a great tribe is on the bloody path!” he said; “warriors would have walked over the timbers of the palisadoes, like bending reeds! ’Tis a Pequot who hath broken faith with a Christian, and who is now abroad, prowling as a wolf in the night.”

A sudden and wild expression gleamed over the swarthy features of the boy. His lips moved, and the words that issued from between them were uttered in the tones of biting scorn. Still he rather muttered, than pronounced aloud—

“The Pequot is a dog!”

“It is as I had thought; the knaves are out of their villages that the Yengeese may feed their squaws. But a Narragansett, or a Wompanoag is a man; he scorns to lurk in the dark-

ness. When he comes, the sun will light his path. The Pequot steals in silence, for he fears that the warriors will hear his tread."

It was not easy to detect any evidence that the captive listened, either to the commendation or the censure, with answering sympathy, for marble is not colder than were the muscles of his unmoved countenance.

The stranger studied the expression of his features in vain, and drawing so near as to lay his hand on the naked shoulder of the lad, he added—"Boy, thou hast heard much moving matter concerning the nature of our Christian faith, and thou hast been the subject of many a fervent asking; it may not be that so much good seed hath been altogether scattered by the way side! Speak; may I again trust thee?"

"Let my father look on the snow. The print of the moccasin goes and comes."

"It is true. Thus far hast thou proved honest; but when the war-whoop shall be thrilling through thy young blood, the temp-

tation to join the warriors may be too strong. Hast any gage, any pledge in which we may find warranty for letting thee depart?"

The boy regarded his interrogator with a look that plainly denoted ignorance of his meaning.

"I would know what thou canst leave with me, to show that our eyes shall again look upon thy face, when we have opened the gate for thy passage into the fields."

Still the gaze of the other was wondering and confused.

"When the white man goes upon the war-path, and would put trust in his foe, he takes surety for his faith, by holding the life of one dear as a warranty of its truth. What canst offer, that I may know thou wilt return from the errand on which I would fain send thee?"

"The path is open?"

"Open, but not certain to be used. Fear may cause thee to forget the way it leads."

The captive now understood the meaning of the other's doubts, but, as if disdaining to reply,

ne bent his eyes aside, and stood in one of those immovable attitudes, which so often gave him the air of a piece of dark statuary.

Content and his wife had listened to this short dialogue, in a manner to prove that they possessed some secret knowledge, which lessened the wonder they might otherwise have felt, at witnessing so obvious proofs of a secret acquaintance between the speakers. Both, however, manifested unequivocal signs of astonishment, when they first heard English sounds issuing from the lips of the boy. There was, at least, the semblance of hope in the mediation of one who had received, and who had appeared to acknowledge, so much kindness from herself, and Ruth clung to the cheering expectation with the quickness of maternal care.

“Let the boy depart,” she said. “I will be his hostage; and should he prove false, there can be less to fear in his absence than in his presence.”

The obvious truth of the latter assertion,

probably weighed more with the stranger, than the unmeaning pledge of the woman.

“ There is reason in this,” he resumed. “ Go, then, into the fields, and say to thy people that they have mistaken the path ; that they are on, hath led them to the dwelling of a friend ; here are no Pequots, nor any of the men of the Manhattoes ; but Christian Yengeese, who have long dealt with the Indian as one just man dealeth with another. Go, and when thy signal shall be heard at the gate, it shall be open to thee for re-admission.”

Thus saying, the stranger motioned to the boy to follow, taking care as they left the room together, to instruct him in all such minor matter, as might assist in effecting the pacific object of the mission on which he was employed.

A few minutes of doubt and fearful suspense succeeded this experiment. The stranger, after seeing that egress was permitted to his messenger, had returned to the dwelling, and rejoined his companions. He passed the mo-

ments in pacing the apartment, with the strides of one in whom powerful concern was strongly at work. At times, the sound of his heavy footstep ceased, and then all listened intently in order to catch any sound that might instruct them in the nature of the scene that was passing without. In the midst of one of these pauses, a yell like that of savage delight rose in the fields. It was then succeeded by the death-like and portentous calm, which had rendered the time since the momentary attack, even more alarming than when the danger had a positive and known character. But all the attention the most intense anxiety could now lend, furnished no additional clue to the movements of their foes. For many minutes, the quiet of midnight reigned, both within and without the defences. In the midst of this suspense, the latch of the door was lifted, and their messenger appeared with that noiseless tread and collected mien, which distinguish the people of his race.

“Thou hast met the warriors of thy tribe?”
hastily demanded the stranger.

“The noise did not cheat the Yengeese. It was not a girl, laughing in the woods.”

“And thou hast said to thy people, ‘we are friends?’”

“The words of my father were spoken.”

“And heard—were they loud enough to enter the ears of the young men?”

The boy was silent.

“Speak,” continued the stranger, elevating his form proudly, like one ready to breast a more severe shock. “Thou hast men for thy listeners. Is the pipe of the savage filled? will he smoke in peace, or holdeth he the tomahawk in a clenched hand?”

The countenance of the boy worked with a feeling that it was not usual for an Indian to betray. He bent his look, with concern, on the mild eyes of the anxious Ruth; then drawing a hand slowly from beneath the light robe

that partly covered his body, he cast, at the feet of the stranger, a bundle of arrows, wrapped in the glossy and striped skin of the rattlesnake.

“This is warning we may not misconceive!” said Content, raising the well known emblem of ruthless hostility to the light, and exhibiting it before the eyes of his less instructed companion. “Boy, what have the people of my race done, that thy warriors should seek their blood, to this extremity?”

When the boy had discharged his duty he moved aside, and appeared unwilling to observe the effect which his message might produce on his companions. But thus questioned, all gentle feelings were near being forgotten, in the sudden force of passion. A hasty glance at Ruth, quelled the emotion, and he continued calm as ever, and silent.

“Boy,” repeated Content, “I ask thee why thy people seek our blood?”

The passage of the electric spark is not more subtle, nor is it scarcely more brilliant, than was the gleam that shot into the dark eye of the Indian. The organ seemed to emit rays coruscant as the glance of the serpent. His form appeared to swell with the inward strivings of his spirit, and for a moment there was every appearance of a fierce and uncontrollable burst of ferocious passion. The conquest of feeling was, however, but momentary. He regained his self-command, by a surprising effort of the will, and advancing so near to him who had asked this bold question, as to lay a finger on his breast, the young savage haughtily said—

“ See ! this world is very wide. There is room on it for the panther and the deer. Why have the Yengeese and the red-men met ? ”

“ We waste the precious moments in probing the stern nature of a heathen,” said the stranger. “ The object of his people is certain, and, with

the aid of the Christian's staff, will we beat back their power. Prudence requireth at our hands, that the lad be secured ; after which, we will repair to the stockades and prove ourselves men."

Against this proposal, no reasonable objection could be raised. Content was about to secure the person of his captive in a cellar, when a suggestion of his wife caused him to change his purpose. Notwithstanding the sudden and fierce mien of the youth, there had been such an intelligence created between them, by looks of kindness and interest, that the mother was reluctant to abandon all hope of his aid.

"Miantonimoh !" she said, "though others distrust thy purpose, I will have confidence. Come, then, with me ; and while I give thee promise of safety in thine own person, I ask at thy hands the office of a protector for my babes."

The boy made no reply, but as he passively

followed his conductress to the chambers, Ruth fancied she read assurance of his faith, in the expression of his eloquent eye. At the same moment her husband and Submission left the house, to take their stations at the palisadoes.

CHAPTER III.

“Thou art my good youth, my page ;

I'll be thy master : walk with me, speak freely.”

Cymbeline.

THE apartment in which Ruth had directed the children to be placed, was in the attic, and, as already stated, on the side of the building which faced the stream that ran at the foot of the hill. It had a single projecting window, through which there was a view of the forest, and of the fields on that side of the valley. Small openings in its sides, admitted also of

glimpses of the grounds which lay further in the rear. In addition to the covering of the roofs, and of the massive frame-work of the building, an interior partition of timber protected the place against the entrance of most missiles then known in the warfare of the country. During the infancy of the children, this room had been their sleeping apartment; nor was it abandoned for that purpose, until the additional outworks, which increased with time around the dwellings, had emboldened the family to trust themselves, at night, in situations more convenient, and which were believed to be no less equally secure against surprise.

“I know thee to be one who feeleth the obligations of a warrior,” said Ruth, as she ushered her follower into the presence of the children. “Thou wilt not deceive me; the lives of these tender ones are in thy keeping. Look to them, Miantonimoh, and the Christian’s God will remember thee in thine own hour of necessity !”

The boy made no reply, but in a gentle expression which was visible in his dark visage, the mother endeavoured to find the pledge she sought. Then, as the youth, with the delicacy of his race, moved aside, in order that they who were bound to each other by ties so near, might indulge their feelings without observation, Ruth again drew near her offspring, with all the tenderness of a mother beaming in her eyes.

“Once more I bid thee not to look too curiously at the fearful strife that may arise in front of our habitations,” she said. “The heathen is truly upon us, with bloody mind; young, as well as old, must now show faith in the protection of our Master, and such courage as befitteth believers.”

“And why is it, mother,” demanded her child, “that they seek to do us harm? Have we ever done evil to them?”

“I may not say. He that hath made the earth, hath given it to us for our uses; and reason would seem to teach that if portions of

its surface are vacant, he that needeth truly, may occupy."

"The savage !" whispered the child, nestling still nearer to the bosom of her stooping parent. "His eye glittereth like the star which hangs above the trees."

"Peace, daughter ; his fierce nature broodeth over some fancied wrong !"

"Surely, we are here rightfully. I have heard my father say, that when the Lord made me a present to his arms, our valley was a tangled forest, and that much toil only has made it as it is."

"I hope that what we enjoy, we enjoy rightfully ; and yet it seemeth that the savage is ready to deny our claims."

"And where do these bloody enemies dwell ? Have they, too, valleys like this, and do the Christians break into them to shed blood in the night ?"

"They are of wild and fierce habits, Ruth, and little do they know of our manner of life.

Woman is not cherished as among the people of thy father's race, for force of body is more regarded than kinder ties."

The little auditor shuddered, and when she buried her face deeper in the bosom of her parent, it was with a more quickened sense of maternal affection, and with a livelier view than her infant perception had ever yet known, of the gentle charities of kindred. When she had spoken, the matron impressed the final kiss on the forehead of each of the children, and asking aloud that God might bless them, she turned to go to the performance of duties that called for the exhibition of very different qualities. Before quitting the room, however, she once more approached the boy, and holding the light before his steady eye, she said solemnly—

"I trust my babes to the keeping of a young warrior!"

The look he returned was like the others, cold but not discouraging. A gaze of many moments elicited no reply, and Ruth prepared

to quit the place, troubled by uncertainty concerning the intentions of the guardian she left with the girls ; while she still trusted that the many acts of kindness which she had shewn him during his captivity, would not go without their reward. Her hand rested on the bolt of the door, in indecision. The moment was favourable to the character of the youth, for she recalled the manner of his return that night, no less than his former acts of faith, and she was about to leave the passage for his egress open, when an uproar arose on the air, which filled the valley with all the hideous cries and yells of a savage onset. Drawing the bolt, the startled woman descended, without further thought, and rushed to her post, with the hurry of one who saw only the necessity of exertion in another scene.

“Stand to the timbers, Reuben Ring ! Bear back the skulking murderers on their bloody followers ! The pikes ! Here, Dudley, is opening for thy valour. The Lord have mercy on

the souls of the ignorant heathen!" mingled with the reports of musketry, the whoops of the warriors, the whizzing of bullets and arrows, with all the other accompaniments of such a contest, were the fearful sounds that saluted the senses of Ruth as she issued into the court. The valley was occasionally lighted by the explosion of fire-arms, and then, at times, the horrible din prevailed in the gloom of deep darkness. Happily, in the midst of all this confusion and violence, the young men of the valley were true to their duties. An alarming attempt to scale the stockade, had already been repulsed, and the true character of two or three feints having been ascertained, the principal force of the garrison was now actively employed in resisting the main attack.

"In the name of Him who is with us in every danger!" exclaimed Ruth, advancing to two figures that were so busily engaged in their own concerns, as not to heed her approach, "tell me how goes the struggle? Where are

my husband and the boy?—or has it pleased Providence that any of our people should be stricken?”

“It hath pleased the Devil,” returned Eben Dudley, somewhat irreverently for one of that chastened school, “to send an Indian arrow, through jerkin and skin, into this arm of mine! Softly, Faith; dost think, girl, that the covering of man is like the coat of a sheep, from which the fleece may be plucked at will! I am no moulting fowl, nor is this arrow a feather of my wing. The Lord forgive the rogue for the ill turn he hath done my flesh, say I, and amen like a Christian! He will have occasion too for the mercy, seeing he hath nothing further to hope for in this world. Now, Faith, I acknowledge the debt of thy kindness, and let there be no more cutting speech between us. Thy tongue often pricketh more sorely than the Indian’s arrow.”

“Whose fault is it that old acquaintance hath sometimes been overlooked, in new con-

versations? Thou knowest that, wooed by proper speech, no maiden in the colony is wont to render gentler answer. Dost feel uneasiness in thine arm, Dudley?"

" 'Tis not tickling with a straw to drive a flint-headed arrow to the bone! I forgive thee the matter of too much discourse with the trooper, and all the side-cuts of thy over-ambuling tongue, on condition that—"

" Out upon thee, brawler! wouldst be prating here the night long on pretence of a broken skin, and the savage at our gates! A fine character will the Madam render of thy deeds, when the other youths have beaten back the Indian, and thou loitering among the buildings!"

The discomfited borderer was about to curse in his heart the versatile humour of his mistress, when he saw, by a side glance, that ears which had no concern in the subject had liked to have shared in the matter of their discourse. Seizing the weapon which was lean-

ing against the foundation of the block, he hurried past the mistress of the family, and, in another minute, his voice and his musket were again heard ringing in the uproar.

“Does he bring tidings from the palisades?” repeated Ruth, too anxious that the young man should return to his post, to arrest his retreat. “What saith he of the onset?”

“The savage hath suffered for his boldness, and little harm hath yet come to our people. Except that yon block of a man hath managed to put arm before the passage of an arrow, I know not that any of our people have been harmed.”

“Hearken! they retire,” said Ruth. “The yells are less near, and our young men will prevail! Go thou to thy charge among the piles of the fuel, and see that no lurker remaineth to do injury. The Lord hath remembered mercy, and it may yet arrive that this evil shall pass away from before us!”

The quick ear of Ruth had not deceived her. The tumult of the assault was gradually receding from the works, and though the flashings of the muskets, and the bellowing reports that rang in the surrounding forest, were not less frequent than before, it was plain that the critical moment of the onset was already past. In place of the fierce effort to carry the place by surprise, the savages had now resorted to means that were more methodical, and which, though not so appalling in appearance, were perhaps quite as certain of final success. Ruth profited by a momentary cessation in the flight of the missiles, to seek those in whose welfare she had placed her chief concern.

“Has other than brave Dudley suffered by this assault?” demanded the anxious wife, as she passed swiftly among a group of dusky figures that were collected in consultation, on the brow of the declivity; “has any need of

such care as a woman's hand may bestow? Heathcote, thy person is unharmed?"

"Truly, One of great mercy hath watched over it, for little opportunity hath been given to look to our own safety. I fear that some of our young men have not regarded the covers with the attention that prudence requires."

"The thoughtless Mark hath not forgotten my admonitions! Boy, thou hast never lost sight of duty so far as to precede thy father?"

"One sees or thinks but little of the red skins, when the whoop is ringing among the timbers of the palisadoes, mother," returned the boy, dashing his hand across his brow, in order that the drops of blood which were trickling from a furrow left by the passage of an arrow, might not be seen. "I have kept near my father, but whether in his front or in his rear the darkness hath not permitted me to note."

"The lad hath behaved in a bold and seemly manner," said the stranger; "and he

hath shewn the metal of his grandsire's stock
Ha! what is't we see gleaming among the
sheds? A sortie may be needed to save the
granaries and thy folds from destruction."

"To the barns! to the barns!" shouted two
of the youths, from their several look-outs.

"The brand is in the buildings!" exclaimed a
maiden who discharged a similar duty under
cover of the dwellings. Then followed a dis-
charge of muskets, all of which were levelled
at the glancing light that was glaring in fearful
proximity to the combustible materials which
filled the most of the out-buildings. A savage
yell, and the sudden extinguishment of the
blazing knot, announced the fatal accuracy of
the aim.

"This may not be neglected!" exclaimed
Content, moved to extraordinary excitement by
the extremity of the danger. "Father!" he
called aloud, "'tis fitting time to show our
utmost strength."

A moment of suspense succeeded this sum-

mons. The whole valley was then as suddenly lighted, as if a torrent of the electric fluid had flashed across its gloomy bed ; a sheet of flame glanced from the attic of the block, and then came the roar of the little piece of artillery which had so long dwelt there in silence. The rattling of a shot among the sheds and the rending of timber followed. Fifty dark forms were seen, by the momentary light, gliding from among the out-buildings, in an alarm natural to their ignorance, and with an agility proportioned to their alarm. The moment was propitious. Content silently motioned to Reuben Ring ; they passed the postern together, and disappeared in the direction of the barns. The period of their absence was one of intense care to Ruth, and it was not without its anxiety even to those whose nerves were better steeled. A few moments, however, served to appease these feelings, for the adventurers returned in safety, and as silently as they had quitted the defences. The trampling of feet on the crust of the

snow, the neighing of horses, and the bellowing of frightened cattle, as the terrified beasts scattered about the fields, soon proclaimed the object of the risk which had just been run.

“Enter,” whispered Ruth, who held the postern with her own hand. “Enter, of Heaven’s mercy. Thou hast given liberty to every hoof, that no living creature perish by the flames?”

“All; and truly not too speedily—for, see, the brand is again at work!”

Content had much reason to felicitate himself on his expedition, for, even while he spoke, half concealed torches, made as usual of blazing knots of pine, were again seen glancing across the fields, evidently approaching the out-buildings by such indirect and covered paths as might protect those who bore them from the shot of the garrison. A final and common effort was made to arrest the danger. The muskets of the young men were active, and more

than once did the citadel of the stern old Puritan give forth its flood of flame, in order to beat back the dangerous visitants. A few shrieks of savage disappointment and of bodily anguish announced the success of these discharges; but though most of those who approached the barns were either driven back in fear or suffered for their temerity, one among them, more wary or more practised than his companions, found means to effect his object. The firing had ceased, and the besieged were congratulating themselves on success, when a sudden light glared across the fields. A sheet of flame soon came curling over the crest of a wheat-stack, and quickly wrapped the inflammable material in its fierce torrent. Against this destruction there remained no remedy. The barns and enclosures which so lately had been lying in the darkness of the hour, were instantly illuminated, and life would have been the penalty paid by any of either party who should dare to trust his person within the bright glare. The borderers

were soon compelled to fall back, even within the shadows of the hill, and to seek such covers as the stockades offered, in order to avoid the aim of the arrow or the bullet.

“This is a mournful spectacle to one that has harvested in charity with all men,” said Content to the trembler who convulsively grasped his arm, as the flames whirled in the currents of the heated air, and sweeping once or twice across the roof of a shed, left a portion of its torrent creeping insidiously along the wooden covering. “The in-gathering of a blessed season is about to melt into ashes before the brand of these accur—”

“Peace, Heathcote! What is wealth, or the fulness of thy granaries, to that which remains! Check these repinings of thy spirit, and bless God that he leaveth us our babes, and the safety of our inner roofs.”

“Thou sayest truly,” returned the husband, endeavouring to imitate the meek resignation of his companion, “What indeed are the gifts

of the world, set in the balance against the peace of mind! Ha! that evil blast of wind sealeth the destruction of our harvest! The fierce element is in the heart of the granaries."

Ruth made no reply; for though less moved by worldly cares than her husband, the frightful progress of the conflagration alarmed her with a sense of personal danger. The flames had passed from roof to roof, and meeting everywhere with fuel of the most combustible nature, the whole of the vast range of barns, sheds, granaries, cribs, and out-buildings, was just breaking forth in the brightness of a torrent of fire. Until this moment, suspense, with hope on one side and apprehension on the other, had kept both parties mute spectators of the scene. But yells of triumph soon proclaimed the delight with which the Indians witnessed the completion of their fell design. The whoops followed this burst of pleasure, and a third onset was made.

The combatants now fought under a brightness which, though less natural, was scarcely less brilliant than that of noon-day. Stimulated by the prospect of success which was offered by the conflagration, the savages rushed upon the stockade with more audacity than it was usual to display in their cautious warfare. A broad shadow was cast by the hill and its buildings across the fields on the side opposite to the flames, and through this belt of comparative gloom, the fiercest of the band made their way to the very palisades with impunity. Their presence was announced by the yell of delight, for too many curious eyes had been drinking in the fearful beauty of the conflagration, to note their approach until the attack had nearly proved successful. The rushes to the defence and to the attack were now alike quick and headlong. Volleys were useless, for the timbers offered equal security to both assailant and assailed. It was a struggle of hand to hand, in which numbers would have prevailed had it not been the

good fortune of the weaker party to act on the defensive. Blows of the knife were passed swiftly between the timbers, and occasionally the discharge of the musket or the twanging of the bow was heard.

“Stand to the timbers, my men!” said the deep tones of the stranger, who spoke in the midst of the fierce struggle with that commanding and stirring cheerfulness that familiarity with danger can alone inspire. “Stand to the defences, and they are impassable. Ha! ’twas well meant, friend savage,” he muttered between his teeth, as he parried, at some jeopardy to one hand, a thrust aimed at his throat, while with the other he seized the warrior who had inflicted the blow, and drawing his naked breast, with the power of a giant, full against the opening between the timbers, he buried his own keen blade to its haft in the body. The eyes of the victim rolled wildly, and when the iron hand which bound him to the wood, with the power of a vice, loosened its grasp, he fell

motionless on the earth. This death was succeeded by the usual yell of disappointment, and the assailants disappeared as swiftly as they had approached.

“God be praised that we have to rejoice in this advantage,” said Content, enumerating the individuals of his force, with an anxious eye, when all were again assembled at the stand on the hill, where, favoured by the glaring light, they could overlook, in comparative security, the more exposed parts of their defences. “We count our own, though I fear me many may have suffered.”

The silence and the occupations of his listeners, most of whom were staunching their blood, was a sufficient answer.

“Hist, father!” said the quick-eyed and observant Mark; “one remaineth on the palisado nearest the wicket. Is it a savage; or do I see a stump in the field beyond?”

All eyes followed the direction of the hand of the speaker, and there was seen, of a cer-

tainty, something clinging to the inner side of one of the timbers, that bore a marked resemblance to the human form. The part of the stockades where the seeming figure clung lay more in obscurity than the rest of the defences, and doubts as to its character were not alone confined to the quick-sighted lad who had first detected its presence.

“ Who hangs upon our palisades ?” called Eben Dudley. “ Speak, that we do not harm a friend !”

The wood itself was not more immovable than the dark object, until the report of the borderer’s musket was heard, and then it came tumbling to the earth like an insensible mass.

“ Fallen like a stricken bear from his tree ! Life was in it, or no bullet of mine could have loosened the hold !” exclaimed Dudley, a little in exultation, as he saw the success of his aim.

“ I will go forward, and see that he is past—”

The mouth of young Mark was stopped by the hand of the stranger, who calmly observed,

“ I will look into the fate of the heathen myself.” He was about to proceed to the spot, when the supposed dead or wounded man sprang to his feet, with a yell that rang in echoes along the margin of the forest, and bounded towards the cover of the buildings, with high and active leaps. Two or three muskets sent their streaks of flame across his path, but seemingly without success. Jumping in a manner to elude the certainty of their fire, the unharmed savage gave forth another yell of triumph, and disappeared among the angles of the dwellings. His cries were understood, for answering whoops were heard in the fields, and the foe without again rallied to the attack.

“ This may not be neglected,” said he who,

more by his self-possession and air of authority, than by any known right to command, had insensibly assumed so much authority in the important business of that night. "One like this, within our walls, may quickly bring destruction on the garrison. The postern may be opened to an inroad—"

"A triple lock secures it," interrupted Content. "The key is hid where none know to seek it, other than such as are of our household."

"And happily the means of passing the private wicket are in my possession," muttered the other, in an under tone. "So far, well; but the brand! the brand! the maidens must look to the fires and lights, while the youths make good the stockade, since this assault admitteth not of further delay."

So saying, the stranger gave an example of courage by proceeding to his stand at the pickets, where, supported by his companions, he continued to defend the approaches against

a discharge of arrows and bullets that was more distant, but scarcely less dangerous to the safety of those who showed themselves on the side of the acclivity, than those which had been previously showered upon the garrison.

In the mean time, Ruth summoned her assistants, and hastened to discharge the duty which had just been prescribed. Water was cast freely on all the fires, and, as the still raging conflagration continued to give far more light than was either necessary or safe, care was taken to extinguish any torch or candle that, in the hurry of alarm, might have been left to moulder in its socket throughout the extensive range of the dwellings and the offices.

CHAPTER IV.

“Thou mild, sad mother—

Quit him not so soon !

Mother, in mercy, stay !

Despair and death are with him ; and canst thou,

With that kind, earthward look, go leave him now ?”

DANA.

WHEN these precautions were taken, the females returned to their several look-outs, and Ruth, whose duty it was, in moments of danger, to exercise a general superintendence, was left to her meditations, and to such watchfulness as her fears might excite. Quitting the inner

rooms, she approached the door that communicated with the court, and for a moment lost the recollection of her immediate cares in a view of the imposing scene by which she was surrounded.

By this time the whole of the vast range of out-buildings, which had been constructed, as was usual in the colonies, of the most combustible materials, and with no regard to the expenditure of wood, was wrapt in fire. Notwithstanding the position of the intermediate edifices, broad flashes of light were constantly crossing the court itself, on whose surface she was able to distinguish the smallest object, while the heavens above her were glaring with a lurid red. Through the openings between the buildings of the quadrangle, the eye could look out upon the fields, where she saw every evidence of a sullen intention on the part of the savages to persevere in their object. Dark, fierce-looking, and nearly naked human forms were seen flitting, from cover to cover, while

there was no stump nor log within arrow's flight of the defences, that did not protect the person of a daring and indefatigable enemy. It was plain the Indians were there in hundreds, and as the assaults continued after the failure of a surprise, it was too evident that they were bent on victory, at some hazard to themselves. No usual means of adding to the horrors of the scene were neglected.

Whoops and yells were incessantly ringing around the place, while the loud and often repeated tones of a conch, betrayed the artifice by which the savages had so often endeavoured, in the earlier part of the night, to lure the garrison out of the palisadoes. A few scattering shot, discharged with deliberation, and from every exposed point within the works, proclaimed both the coolness and the vigilance of the defendants. The little gun in the block-house was silent, for the Puritan knew too well its real power to lessen its reputation by a too frequent use. The weapon was there-

fore reserved for those moments of pressing danger that would be sure to arrive.

On this spectacle Ruth gazed in fearful sadness. The long sustained and sylvan security of her abode was violently destroyed, and in the place of a quiet, which had approached as near as may be on earth to that holy peace for which her spirit strove, she and all she most loved were suddenly confronted to the most frightful exhibition of human horrors. In such a moment, the feelings of a mother were likely to revive, and ere time was given for reflection, aided by the light of the conflagration, the matron was moving swiftly through the intricate passages of the dwelling, in quest of those whom she had placed in the security of the chambers.

“Thou hast remembered to avoid looking on the fields, my children,” said the nearly breathless woman as she entered the room. “Be thankful, babes; hitherto the efforts of the

savages have been vain, and we still remain masters of our habitations."

"Why is the night so red? Come hither, mother; thou mayest look into the wood as if the sun were shining!"

"The heathens have fired our granaries, and what thou seest is the light of the flames. But happily they cannot put brand into the dwellings while thy father and the young men stand to their weapons. We must be grateful for this security, frail as it seemeth. Thou hast knelt, my Ruth, and hast remembered to think of thy father and brother in thy prayers?"

"I will do so again, mother," whispered the child, bending to her knees, and wrapping her young features in the garments of the matron.

"Why hide thy countenance? One young and innocent as thou, may lift thine eyes to heaven with confidence."

"Mother, I see the Indian, unless my face be hid. He looketh at me, I fear, with wish to do us harm."

“Thou art not just to Miantonimoh, child,” answered Ruth, as she glanced her eye rapidly round to seek the boy, who had modestly withdrawn into a remote and shaded corner of the room. “I left him with thee for a guardian, and not as one who would wish to injure. Now think of thy God, child,” imprinting a kiss on the cold, marble-like forehead of her daughter, “and have reliance in his goodness. Miantonimoh, I again leave you with a charge to be their protector,” she added, quitting her daughter and advancing towards the youth.

“Mother!” shrieked the child, “come to me, or I die!”

Ruth turned from the listening captive, with the quickness of instinct. A glance showed her the jeopardy of her offspring. A naked savage, dark, powerful of frame, and fierce in the frightful masquerade of his war-paint, stood winding the silken hair of the girl in one hand, while he already held the glittering axe above a head that seemed inevitably devoted to destruction.

“ Mercy ! mercy ! ” exclaimed Ruth, hoarse with horror, and dropping to her knees, as much from inability to stand as with intent to petition.

“ Monster, strike me, but spare the child ! ”

The eyes of the Indian rolled over the person of the speaker, but it was with an expression that seemed rather to enumerate the number of his victims, than to announce any change of purpose. With a fiendlike coolness, that bespoke much knowledge of the ruthless practice, he again swung the quivering but speechless child in the air, and prepared to direct the weapon with a fell certainty of aim. The tomahawk had made its last circuit, and an instant would have decided the fate of the victim, when the captive boy stood in front of the frightful actor in this revolting scene. By a quick forward movement of his arm, the blow was arrested. The deep guttural ejaculation, which betrays the surprise of an Indian, broke from the chest of the savage, while his hand fell to his side, and the form of the suspended girl was suffered

again to touch the floor. The look and gesture with which the boy had interfered, expressed authority rather than resentment or horror. His air was calm, collected, and, as it appeared by the effect, imposing.

“Go,” he said, in the language of the fierce people from whom he had sprung; “the warriors of the pale men are calling thee by name.”

“The snow is red with the blood of our young men,” the other fiercely answered; “and not a scalp is at the belt of my people.”

“These are mine,” returned the boy, with dignity, sweeping his arm, while speaking, in a manner to show that he extended protection to all present.

The warrior gazed about him grimly, and like one but half convinced. He had incurred a danger too fearful, in entering the stockade, to be easily diverted from his purpose.

“Listen!” he continued, after a short pause, during which the artillery of the Puritan had again bellowed in the uproar without. “The

thunder is with the Yengeese ! Our young women will look another way, and call us Pequots, should there be no scalps on our pole."

For a single moment the countenance of the boy changed, and his resolution seemed to waver. The other, who watched his eyes with longing eagerness, again seized his victim by the hair, when Ruth shrieked in the accents of despair—

" Boy ! boy ! if thou art not with us, God hath deserted us !"

" She is mine," burst fiercely from the lips of the lad. " Hear my words, Wompahwisset ; the blood of my father is very warm within me."

The other paused, and the blow was once more suspended. The glaring eye-balls of the savage rested intently on the swelling form and stern countenance of the young hero, whose uplifted hand appeared to menace instant punishment, should he dare to disregard the mediation. The lips of the warrior severed, and the word ' Miantonimoh ' was uttered, as softly as if it re-

called a feeling of sorrow. Then, as a sudden burst of yells rose above the roar of the conflagration, the fierce Indian turned in his tracks, and, abandoning the trembling and nearly insensible child, he bounded away like a hound loosened on a fresh scent of blood.

“ Boy ! boy ! ” murmured the mother ;
“ heathen or christian, there is One that will
bless thee !—”

A rapid gesture of the hand interrupted the fervent expression of her gratitude. Pointing after the form of the retreating savage, the lad encircled his own head with a finger, in a manner that could not be mistaken, as he uttered, steadily, but with the deep emphasis of an Indian—

“ The young pale-face has a scalp ! ”

Ruth heard no more. With instinctive rapidity, every feeling of her soul quickened nearly to agony, she rushed below, in order to warn Mark against the machinations of so fearful an enemy. Her step was heard but

for a moment in the vacant chambers, and then the Indian boy, whose steadiness and authority had just been so signally exerted in favour of the children, resumed his attitude of meditation, as quietly as if he took no further interest in the frightful events of the night.

The situation of the garrison was now, indeed, to the last degree critical. A torrent of fire had passed from the further extremity of the out-houses to that which stood nearest to the defences, and, as building after building melted beneath its raging power, the palisadoes became heated nearly to the point of ignition. The alarm created by this imminent danger had already been given, and when Ruth issued into the court, a female was rushing past her, seemingly on some errand of the last necessity.

“Hast seen him?” demanded the breathless mother, arresting the steps of the quick-moving girl.

“Not since the savage made his last onset;

but I warrant me he may be found near the western loops, making good the works against the enemy !”

“ Surely he is not foremost in the fray ! Of whom speakest thou, Faith ? I questioned thee of Mark. There is one, even now, raging within the pickets, seeking a victim.”

“ Truly, I thought it had been question of —— ; the boy is with his father, and the stranger soldier, who does such deeds of valour in our behalf. I have seen no enemy within the palisadoes, Madam Heathcote, since the entry of the man who escaped, by favour of the powers of darkness, from the shot of Eben Dudley’s musket.”

“ And is this evil like to pass from us ?” resumed Ruth, breathing more freely, as she learned the safety of her son ; “ or does Providence veil its face in anger ?”

“ We keep our own, though the savage hath pressed the young men to extremity. Oh ! it gladdened one’s heart to see how brave a guard

Reuben Ring, and others near him, made in our behalf. I do think me, Madam Heathcote, that, after all, there is real manhood in the brawler Dudley! Truly, the youth hath done marvels in the way of exposure and resistance. Twenty times this night have I expected to see him slain."

"And he that lyeth there?" half whispered the alarmed Ruth, pointing to a spot near them, where, aside from the movements of those who still acted in the bustle of the combat, one lay stretched on the earth; "who hath fallen?"

The cheek of Faith blanched to a whiteness that nearly equalled that of the linen, which, even in the hurry of such a scene, some friendly hand had found leisure to throw, in decent sadness, over the form.

"That!" said the faltering girl. "Though hurt and bleeding, my brother Reuben surely keepeth the loop at the western angle; nor is Whittal wanting in sufficient sense to take heed

of danger. This may not be the stranger, for under the covers of the postern breast-work he holdeth counsel with the young captain."

"Art certain, girl?"

"I saw them both within the minute. Would to God, we could hear the shout of noisy Dudley, Madam Heathcote: his cry cheereth the heart, in a moment awful as this!"

"Lift the cloth," said Ruth, with calm solemnity, "that we may know which of our friends hath been called to the great account."

Faith hesitated, and when, by a powerful effort, in which secret interest had as deep an influence as obedience, she did comply, it was with a sort of desperate resolution. On raising the linen, the eyes of the two women rested on the pallid countenance of one who had been transfixed by an iron-headed arrow. The girl dropped the linen, and in a voice that

sounded like a burst of hysterical feeling, she exclaimed—

“ ’Tis but the youth that came lately among us! We are spared the loss of any ancient friend.”

“ ’Tis one who died for our safety. I would give largely of this world’s comforts that this calamity might not have been, or that greater leisure for the last fearful reckoning had been accorded. But we may not lose the moments in mourning. Hie thee, girl, and sound the alarm that a savage lurketh within our walls, and that he skulketh in quest of a secret blow. Bid all be wary. If the young Mark should cross thy path, speak to him twice of this danger; the child hath a froward spirit, and may not hearken to words uttered in too great hurry.”

With this charge Ruth quitted her maiden. While the latter proceeded to give the necessary notice, the other sought the spot where she had

just learned there was reason to believe her husband might be found.

Content and the stranger were in fact met in consultation over the danger which threatened destruction to their most important means of defence. The savages themselves appeared to be conscious that the flames were working in their favour, for their efforts sensibly slackened; and having already severely suffered in their attempts to annoy the garrison, they had fallen back to their covers, and awaited the moment when their practised cunning should tell them they might, with more flattering promises of success, again rally to the onset. A brief explanation served to make Ruth acquainted with the imminent jeopardy of their situation. Under a sense of a more appalling danger she lost the recollection of her former purpose, and with a contracted and sorrowing eye, she stood, like her companions, in impotent helplessness, an entranced spectator of the progress of the destruction.

“ A soldier should not waste words in useless plaints,” observed the stranger, folding his arms like one who was conscious that human effort could do no more, “ else should I say, ’tis pity that he who drew yon line of stockade hath not remembered the uses of the ditch.”

“ I will summon the maidens to the wells,” said Ruth.

“ ’Twill not avail us. The arrow would be among them, nor could mortal long endure the heat of yon glowing furnace. Thou seest that the timbers already smoke and blacken under its fierceness.”

The stranger was still speaking, when a small quivering flame played on the corners of the palisadoe, nearest the burning pile. The element fluttered like a waving line along the edges of the heated wood, after which it spread over the whole surface of the timber, from its larger base to the pointed summit. As if this had merely been the signal of a

general destruction, the flames kindled in fifty places at the same instant, and then the whole line of the stockade, nearest the conflagration, was covered with fire. A yell of triumph arose in the fields, and a flight of arrows, sailing tauntingly into the works, announced the fierce impatience of those who watched the increase of the conflagration.

“We shall be driven to our block,” said Content. “Assemble thy maidens, Ruth, and make speedy preparation for the last retreat.”

“I go; but hazard not thy life in any vain endeavour to retard the flames. There will yet be time for all that is needful to our security.”

“I know not,” hurriedly observed the stranger; “here cometh the assault in a new aspect!”

The feet of Ruth were arrested. On looking upward she saw the object which had drawn this remark from the last speaker. A small bright ball of fire had arisen out of the fields, and describing an arc in the air, it sailed above their

heads and fell on the shingles of a building which formed part of the quadrangle of the inner court. The movement was that of an arrow thrown from a distant bow, and its way was to be traced by a long trail of light, that followed its course like a blazing meteor. This burning arrow had been sent with a cool and practised judgment. It lighted upon a portion of the combustibles that were nearly as inflammable as gunpowder, and the eye had scarcely succeeded in tracing it to its fall, ere the bright flames were seen stealing over the heated roof.

“One struggle for our habitations!” cried Content; but the hand of the stranger was placed firmly on his shoulder. At that instant a dozen similar meteor-looking balls shot into the air, and fell in as many different places on the already half-kindled pile. Further efforts would have been useless. Relinquishing the hope of saving his property, every thought was now given to personal safety.

Ruth recovered from her short trance, and hastened with hurried steps to perform her well-known office. Then came a few minutes of exertion, during which the females transferred all that was necessary to their subsistence, and which had not been already provided in the block, to their little citadel. The glowing light which penetrated the darkest passages among the buildings, prevented this movement from being made without discovery. The whoop summoned their enemies to another attack. The arrows thickened in the air, and the important duty was not performed without risk, as all were obliged, in some degree, to expose their persons while passing to and fro, loaded with necessaries. The gathering smoke, however, served in some measure for a screen, and it was not long before Content received the welcome tidings that he might command the retreat of his young men from the palisadoes. The conch sounded the necessary signal, and ere the foe had time to understand its meaning,

or profit by the defenceless state of the works, every individual within them had reached the door of the block in safety. Still there was more of hurry and confusion than altogether comported with their safety. They who were assigned to that duty, however, mounted eagerly to the loops, and stood in readiness to pour out their fire on whoever might dare to come within its reach, while a few still lingered in the court, to see that no necessary provision for resistance, or of safety, was forgotten. Ruth had been foremost in exertion, and she now stood pressing her hands to her temples, like one whose mind was bewildered by her own efforts.

“Our fallen friend!” she said. “Shall we leave his remains to be mangled by the savage?”

“Surely not; Dudley, thy hand. We will bear the body within the lower——Ha! death hath struck another of our family.”

The alarm with which Content made this discovery passed quickly to all in hearing. It was but too apparent, by the shape of the linen,

that two bodies lay beneath its folds. Anxious and rapid looks were cast, from face to face, in order to learn who was missing; and then, conscious of the hazard of further delay, Content raised the linen, in order to remove all doubts by certainty. The form of the young borderer, who was known to have fallen, was first slowly and reverently uncovered; but even the most self-restrained among the spectators started back in horror, as his robbed and reeking head showed that a savage hand had worked its ruthless will on the unresisting corpse.

“The other!” Ruth struggled to say, and it was only as her husband had half removed the linen that she could succeed in uttering the words—“Beware the other!”

The warning was not useless, for the linen waved violently as it rose under the hand of Content, and a grim Indian sprang into the very centre of the startled group. Sweeping his armed hand widely about him, the savage broke through the receding circle, and, giving

forth the appalling whoop of his tribe, he bounded into the open door of the principal dwelling, so swiftly as utterly to defeat any design of pursuit. The arms of Ruth were frantically extended towards the place where he had disappeared, and she was about to rush madly on his footsteps, when the hand of her husband stopped the movement.

“Wouldst hazard life to save some worthless trifle?”

“Husband, release me!” returned the woman, nearly choked with her agony—“nature hath slept within me!”

“Fear blindeth thy reason!”

The form of Ruth ceased to struggle. All the madness, which had been glaring wildly about her eyes, disappeared in the settled look of an almost preternatural calm. Collecting the whole of her mental energy in one desperate effort of self-command, she turned to her husband, and as her bosom swelled with the terror

that seemed to stop her breath, she said, in a voice that was frightful by its composure—

“ If thou hast a father’s heart release me !—
Our babes have been forgotten !”

The hand of Content relaxed its hold ; and, in another instant, the form of his wife was lost to view on the track that had just been taken by the successful savage. This was the luckless moment chosen by the foe to push his advantage. A fierce burst of yells proclaimed the activity of the assailants, and a general discharge from the loops of the block-house sufficiently apprised those in the court that the onset of the enemy was now pushed into the very heart of the defences. All had mounted but the few who lingered to discharge the melancholy duty to the dead. They were too few to render resistance prudent, and yet too many to think of deserting the distracted mother and her offspring, without an effort.

“ Enter,” said Content, pointing to the door

of the block ; “ it is my duty to share the fate of those nearest my blood.”

The stranger made no answer. Placing his powerful hands on the nearly stupified husband, he thrust his person, by an irresistible effort, within the basement of the building, and then he signed, by a quick gesture, for all around him to follow. After the last form had entered, he commanded that the fastenings of the door should be secured, remaining himself, as he believed, alone without. But when, by a rapid glance, he saw there was another gazing in dull awe on the features of the fallen man, it was too late to rectify the mistake. Yells were now rising out of the black smoke that was rolling in volumes from the heated buildings, and it was plain that only a few feet divided them from their pursuers. Beckoning the man who had been excluded from the block to follow, the stern soldier rushed into the principal dwelling, which was still but little injured by the fire. Guided rather by chance than by any

knowledge of the windings of the building, he soon found himself in the chambers. He was now at a loss whither to proceed. At that moment, his companion, who was no other than Whittal Ring, took the lead, and in another instant, they were at the door of the secret apartment.

“Hist!” said the stranger, raising a hand to command silence as he entered the room. “Our hope is in secrecy.”

“And how may we escape without detection?” demanded the mother, pointing about her at objects illuminated by a light so powerful as to penetrate every cranny of the ill-constructed building. “The noon-day sun is scarce brighter than this dreadful fire!”

“God is in the elements! His guiding hand shall point the way. But here we may not tarry, for the flames are already on the shingles. Follow, and speak not.”

Ruth pressed the children to her side, and the whole party left the apartment of the attic

in a body. Their descent to a lower room was made quickly and without discovery. But here their leader paused, for the state of things without was one to demand the utmost steadiness of nerve, and great reflection.

The Indians had by this time gained command of the whole of Mark Heathcote's possessions, with the exception of the block-house; and as their first act had been to apply the brand wherever it might be wanting, the roar of the conflagration was now heard in every direction. The discharge of muskets and the whoops of the combatants, however, while they added to the horrible din of such a scene, proclaimed the unconquered resolution of those who held the citadel. A window of the room they occupied enabled the stranger to take a cautious survey of what was passing without. The court, lighted to the brilliancy of day, was empty, for the increasing heat of the fires, no less than the discharges from the loops, still kept the cautious savages to their covers. There

was barely hope, that the space between the dwelling and the block-house might yet be passed in safety.

“I would I had asked that the door of the block should be held in hand,” muttered Submission; “it would be death to linger an instant in that fierce light; nor have we any manner of—”

A touch was laid upon his arm, and turning, the speaker saw the dark eye of the captive boy looking steadily in his face.

“Wilt do it?” demanded the other, in a manner to show that he doubted, while he hoped.

A speaking gesture of assent was the answer, and then the form of the lad was seen gliding quietly from the room.

Another instant and Miantonimoh appeared in the court. He walked with the deliberation that one would have shewn in moments of the most entire security. A hand was raised towards the loops, as if to betoken amity, and

then dropping the limb, he moved with the same slow step into the very centre of the area. Here the boy stood in the fullest glare of the conflagration, and turned his face deliberately on every side of him. The action showed that he wished to invite all eyes to examine his person. At this moment the yells ceased in the surrounding covers, proclaiming alike the common feeling that was awakened by his appearance, and the hazard that any other would have incurred by exposing himself in that fearful scene. When this act of exceeding confidence had been performed, the boy drew a pace nearer to the entrance of the block.

“Comest thou in peace, or is this another device of Indian treachery?” demanded a voice, through an opening in the door, left expressly for the purposes of parley.

The boy raised the palm of one hand towards the speaker, while he laid the other with a gesture of confidence on his naked breast.

“Hast aught to offer in behalf of my wife

and babes? If gold will buy their ransom, name thy price."

Miantonimoh was at no loss to comprehend the other's meaning. With the readiness of one whose faculties had been early schooled in the inventions of emergencies, he made a gesture that said even more than his figurative words, as he answered—

"Can a woman of the pale-faces pass through wood? An Indian arrow is swifter than the foot of my mother."

"Boy, I trust thee," returned the voice from within the loop. "If thou deceivest beings so feeble and so innocent, Heaven will remember the wrong."

Miantonimoh again made a sign to show that caution must be used, and then he retired, with a step calm and measured as that used in his advance. Another pause to the shouts betrayed the interest of those whose fierce eyes watched his movements in the distance.

When the young Indian had rejoined the party in the dwelling, he led them, without being observed by the lurking band that still hovered in the smoke of the surrounding buildings, to a spot that commanded a full view of their short but perilous route. At this moment the door of the block-house half-opened, and was closed again. Still the stranger hesitated, for he saw how little was the chance that all should cross the court unharmed; and to pass it by repeated trials he knew to be impossible.

“Boy,” he said, “thou, who hast done thus much, may still do more. Ask mercy for these children, in some manner that may touch the hearts of thy people.”

Miantonimoh shook his head, and pointing to the ghastly corpse that lay in the court, he answered coldly—

“The red man has tasted blood.”

“Then must the desperate trial be done!”

Think not of thy children, devoted and daring mother, but look only to thine own safety. This witless youth and I will charge ourselves with the care of the innocents."

Ruth waved him away with her hand, pressing her mute and trembling daughter to her bosom, in a manner to show that her resolution was taken. The stranger yielded, and turning to Whittal, who stood near him, seemingly as much occupied in vacant admiration of the blazing piles, as in any apprehension of his own personal danger, he bade him look to the safety of the remaining child. Moving in front himself, he was about to offer Ruth such protection as the case afforded, when a window in the rear of the house was dashed inward, announcing the entrance of the enemy, and the imminent danger that their flight would be intercepted. There was no time to lose, for it was now certain that only a single room separated them from their foes. The generous

nature of Ruth was roused, and catching Martha from the arms of Whittal Ring, she endeavoured, by a desperate effort, in which feeling, rather than any reasonable motive, predominated, to envelope both the children in her robe.

“ I am with ye ! ” whispered the agitated woman ; “ hush ye, hush ye, babes ! thy mother is nigh ! ”

The stranger was very differently employed. The instant the crash of glass was heard, he rushed to the rear, and he had already grappled with the savage so often named, and who acted as guide to a dozen fierce and yelling followers.

“ 'To the block ! ” shouted the steady soldier, while with a powerful arm he held his enemy in the throat of the narrow passage, stopping the approach of those in the rear by the body of his foe. “ For the love of life and children, woman, to the block ! ”

The summons rang frightfully in the ears of Ruth, but, in that moment of extreme jeopardy,

her presence of mind was lost. The cry was repeated, and not till then did the bewildered mother catch her daughter from the floor. With eyes still bent on the fierce struggle in her rear, she clasped the child to her heart and fled, calling on Whittal Ring to follow. The lad obeyed, and ere she had half crossed the court, the stranger, still holding his savage shield between him and his enemies, was seen endeavouring to take the same direction. The whoops, the flight of arrows, and the discharges of musketry that succeeded, proclaimed the whole extent of the danger. But fear had lent unnatural vigour to the limbs of Ruth, and the gliding arrows themselves scarce sailed more swiftly through the heated air, than she darted into the open door of the block. Whittal Ring was less successful. As he crossed the court, bearing the child entrusted to his care, an arrow pierced his flesh. Stung by the pain,

the witless lad turned, in anger, to chide the hand that had inflicted the injury.

“ On, foolish boy !” cried the stranger, as he passed him, still making a target of the body of the savage that was writhing in his grasp ; “ on, for thy life, and that of the babe !”

The mandate came too late. The hand of an Indian was already on the innocent victim, and in the next instant the child was sweeping the air, while with a short yell the keen axe flourished above his head. A shot from the loops laid the monster dead in his tracks. The girl was instantly seized by another hand, and as the captor with his prize darted unharmed into the dwelling, there arose in the block a common exclamation of the name of “ Miantonimoh !” Two more of the savages profited by the pause of horror that followed, to lay hands on the wounded Whittal, and to drag him within the blazing building. At the same moment, the stranger cast the unresisting savage back upon

the weapons of his companions. The bleeding and half-strangled Indian met the blows which had been aimed at the life of the soldier, and as he staggered and fell, his vigorous conqueror disappeared in the block. The door of the little citadel was instantly closed, and the savages, who rushed headlong against the entrance, heard the fitting of the bars which secured it against their attacks. The yell of retreat was raised, and in the next instant the court was left to the possession of the dead.

CHAPTER V.

—— “Did Heaven look on,
And would not take their part?
—— Heaven rest them now!”

Macbeth.

“WE will be thankful for this blessing,” said Content, as he aided the half unconscious Ruth to mount the ladder, yielding himself to a feeling of nature that said little against his manhood. “If we have lost one that we loved, God hath spared our own child.”

His breathless wife threw herself into a seat

and folding the treasure to her bosom, she whispered rather than said aloud—"From my soul, Heathcote, am I grateful!"

"Thou shieldest the babe from my sight," returned the father, stooping to conceal a tear that was stealing down his brown cheek, under a pretence of embracing the child—but suddenly recoiling, he added, in alarm—"Ruth!"

Startled by the tone in which her husband uttered her name, the mother threw aside the folds of her dress, which still concealed the girl, and stretching her out to the length of an arm, she saw that, in the hurry of the appalling scene, the children had been exchanged, and that she had saved the life of Martha.

Notwithstanding the generous disposition of Ruth, it was impossible to repress the feeling of disappointment which came over her with the consciousness of the mistake. Nature at first had sway, and to a degree that was fearfully powerful.

“It is not our babe!” shrieked the mother, still holding the child at the length of her arm, and gazing at its innocent and terrified countenance, with an expression that Martha had never yet seen gleaming from eyes that were, in common, so soft and so indulgent.

“I am thine! I am thine!” murmured the little trembler, struggling in vain to reach the bosom that had so long cherished her infancy. “If not thine, whose am I?”

The gaze of Ruth was still wild, the workings of her features hysterical.

“Madam — Mrs. Heathcote — mother!” came, timidly, and at intervals, from the lips of the orphan. Then the heart of Ruth relented. She clasped the daughter of her friend to her breast, and Nature found a temporary relief in one of those frightful exhibitions of anguish, which appear to threaten the dissolution of the link which connects the soul with the body.

“Come, daughter of John Harding,” said Content, looking around him with the assumed composure of a chastened man, while natural regret struggled hard at his heart; “this has been God’s pleasure: it is meet that we kiss his parental hand. Let us be thankful,” he added, with a quivering lip, but steady eye, “that even this mercy hath been shown. Our babe is with the Indian, but our hopes are far beyond the reach of savage malignity. We have not laid up treasure where moth and rust can corrupt, or where thieves may break in and steal. It may be that the morning shall bring means of parley, and, haply, opportunity of ransom.”

There was the glimmering of hope in this suggestion. The idea seemed to give a new direction to the thoughts of Ruth, and the change enabled the long habits of self-restraint to regain something of their former ascendancy. The fountains of her tears became dry, and,

after one short and terrible struggle, she was again enabled to appear composed. But at no time, during the continuance of that fearful struggle, was Ruth Heathcote again the same ready and useful agent of activity and order, that she had been in the earlier events of the night.

It is scarcely necessary to remind the reader that the brief burst of parental agony which has just been related, escaped Content and his wife, amid a scene in which the other actors were too much occupied by their exertions to note its exhibition. The fate of those in the block was too evidently approaching its close, to allow of any interest in such an episode to the great tragedy of the moment.

The character of the contest had in some measure changed. There was no longer any immediate apprehension from the missiles of the assailants, though danger pressed upon the besieged in a new, and even in a more horri-

ble aspect. Now and then, indeed, an arrow quivered in the openings of the loops, and the blunt Dudley had once a narrow escape from the passage of a bullet, which, guided by chance, or aimed by a hand surer than common, glanced through one of the narrow slits, and would have terminated the history of the borderer, had not the head it obliquely encountered been too solid to yield even to such an assault. The attention of the garrison was chiefly called to the imminent danger of the surrounding fire. Though the probability of such an emergency as that in which the family was now placed had certainly been foreseen, and in some degree guarded against, in the size of the area and in the construction of the block, yet it was found that the danger exceeded all former calculations.

For the basement there was no reason to feel alarm. It was of stone, and of a thickness and a material to put at defiance any artifices that

their enemy might find time to practise. Even the two upper stories were comparatively safe, for they were composed of blocks so solid as to require time to heat them, and they were consequently as little liable to combustion as wood well could be. But the roof, like all of that, and indeed like most of the present day, in America, was composed of short inflammable shingles of pine. The superior height of the tower was some little protection; but as the flames rose roaring above the buildings of the court, and waved in wide circuits around the heated area, the whole of the fragile covering of the block was often wrapped in folds of fire. The result may be anticipated. Content was first recalled from the bitterness of his parental regret, by a cry, which passed among the family, that the roof of their little citadel was in flames. One of the ordinary wells of the habitation was in the basement of the edifice, and it was fortunate that no precaution neces-

sary to render it serviceable, in an emergency like that which was now arrived, had been neglected. A well secured shaft of stone rose through the lower apartment into the upper floor. Profiting by this happy precaution, the hand-maidens of Ruth plied the buckets with diligence, while the young men cast water freely on the roof from the windows of the attic. The latter duty, it may readily be supposed, was not performed without hazard. Flights of arrows were constantly directed against the labourers, and more than one of the youths received greater or less injuries while exposed to their annoyance. There were, indeed, a few minutes during which it remained a question of grave interest how far the risk they ran was likely to be crowned with success. The excessive heat of so many fires, and the occasional contact with the flames, as they swept in eddies over the place, began to render it doubtful whether any human efforts could long arrest

the evil. Even the massive and moistened logs of the body of the work began to smoke, and it was found, by experiment, that the hand could rest but a moment on their surface.

During this interval of deep suspense, all the men posted at the loops were called to aid in extinguishing the fire. Resistance was forgotten in the discharge of a duty that had become still more pressing. Ruth herself was aroused by the nature of the alarm ; and all hands and all minds were arduously occupied in a toil that diverted attention from incidents which had less interest, because they were teeming less with instant destruction. Danger is known to lose its terrors by familiarity. The young borderers became reckless of their persons in the ardour of exertion ; and as success began to crown their efforts, something like the levity of happier moments got the better of their concern. Stolen and curious glances were thrown around a place that had so long been kept sacred to the secret

uses of the Puritan, when it was found that the flames were subdued, and that the present danger was averted. The light glared powerfully through several openings in the shingles, no less than through the windows; and every eye was enabled to scan the contents of an apartment which all had longed, though none had ever before presumed, to enter.

“The Captain looketh well to the body,” whispered Reuben Ring to one of his comrades, as he wiped the effects of the toil from a sunburnt brow. “Thou seest, Hiram, that there is good store of cheer.”

“The buttery is not better stored!” returned the other, with the shrewdness and ready observation of a border man.

“It is known that he never toucheth that which the cow yields, except as it comes from the creature, and here we find of the best that the Madam’s dairy can yield!”

“Surely yon buff jerkin is like to those worn

by the idle cavaliers at home ! I think it be long since the captain hath ridden forth in such a guise."

" That may be matter of ancient usage, for thou seest he hath relics of the fashion of the English troopers in this bit of steel ; it is like he holdeth deep exercise over the vanities of his youth, while recalling the times in which they were worn."

This conjecture appeared to satisfy the other, though it is probable that a sight of a fresh store of bodily aliment, which was soon after exposed, in order to gain access to the roof, might have led to some further inferences, had more time been given to conjectures. But at this moment a new wail proceeded from the maidens who plied the buckets beneath.

" To the loops ! to the loops, or we are lost !" was a summons that admitted of no delay. Led by the stranger, the young men rushed below ;

where, in truth, they found a serious demand on all their activity and courage.

The Indians were wanting in none of the sagacity which so remarkably distinguishes the warfare of this cunning race. The time spent by the family in arresting the flames had not been thrown away by the assailants. Profiting by the attention of those within, to efforts that were literally of the last importance, they had found means to convey burning brands to the door of the block, against which they had piled a mass of blazing combustibles, that threatened shortly to open the way into the basement of the citadel itself. In order to mask this design, and to protect their approaches, the savages had succeeded in dragging bundles of straw, and other similar materials, to the foot of the work, to which the fire soon communicated, and which, consequently, served both to increase the actual danger of the building, and to distract the at-

tention of those by whom it was defended. Although the water that fell from the roof served to retard the progress of these flames, it contributed to produce the effect, of all others, that was most desired by the savages. The dense volumes of smoke that arose from the half-smothered fire first apprised the females of the new danger which assailed them. When Content and the stranger reached the principal floor of their citadel, it required some little time, and no small degree of coolness, to comprehend the situation in which they were now placed. The vapour that rolled upward from the wet straw and hay had already penetrated into the apartment, and it was with no slight difficulty that they who occupied it were enabled to distinguish objects, or even to breathe.

“Here is matter to exercise our utmost fortitude,” said the stranger, to his constant companion. “We must look to this new device, or we come to the fate of death by fire. Summon

the stoutest-hearted of thy youths, and I will lead them to a sortie, ere the evil get past a remedy."

"That were certain victory to the heathen. Thou hearest, by their yells, that 'tis no small band of scouts who beleaguer us; a tribe hath sent forth its chosen warriors to do their wickedness. Better is it that we bestir ourselves to drive them from our door, and to prevent the further annoyance of this cloud; since, to issue from the block at this moment would be to offer our heads to the tomahawk, and to ask mercy is as vain as to hope to move the rock with tears."

"And in what manner may we do this needful service?"

"Our muskets will still command the entrance, by means of these downward loops; and water may be yet applied through the same openings. Thought hath been had of this danger, in the disposition of the place."

“ Then, of Heaven’s mercy ! delay not the effort.”

The necessary measures were taken instantly. Eben Dudley applied the muzzle of his piece to a loop, and discharged it downward, in the direction of the endangered door. But aim was impossible in the obscurity, and his want of success was proclaimed by a taunting shout of triumph. Then followed a flood of water, which, however, was scarcely of more service, since the savages had foreseen its use, and had made a provision against its effects, by placing boards, and such vessels as they found scattered among the buildings, above the fire, in a manner to prevent most of the fluid from reaching its aim.

“ Come hither with thy musket, Reuben Ring,” said Content, hurriedly ; “ the wind stirreth the smoke here ; the savages still heap fuel against the wall.”

The borderer complied. There were in fact

moments when dark human forms were to be seen gliding in silence around the building, though the density of the vapour rendered the forms indistinct and their movements doubtful. With a cool and practised eye, the youth sought a victim ; but as he discharged his musket an object glanced near his own visage, as though the bullet had recoiled on him who had given it a very different mission. Stepping backward a little hurriedly, he saw the stranger pointing through the smoke at an arrow which still quivered in the floor above them.

“ We cannot long abide these assaults,” the soldier muttered ; “ something must be speedily devised, or we fall.”

His words ceased, for a yell that appeared to lift the floor on which he stood, announced the destruction of the door and the presence of the savages in the basement of the tower. Both parties appeared momentarily confounded at this unexpected success, for while the one stood

mute with astonishment and dread, the other did little more than triumph. But this inaction soon ended. The conflict was resumed, though the efforts of the assailants began to assume the confidence of victory, while on the part of the besieged they partook fearfully of the aspect of despair.

A few muskets were discharged, both from below and above, at the intermediate floor, but the thickness of the planks prevented the bullets from doing injury. Then commenced a struggle in which the respective qualities of the combatants were exhibited in a singularly characteristic manner. While the Indians improved their advantages beneath, with all the arts known to savage warfare, the young men resisted with that wonderful aptitude of expedient, and readiness of execution, which distinguish the American borderer.

The first attempt of the assailants was to burn the floor of the lower apartment. In order

to effect this, they threw vast piles of straw into the basement. But ere the brand was applied, water had reduced the inflammable material to a black and murky pile. Still the smoke had nearly effected a conquest which the fire itself had failed to achieve. So suffocating indeed were the clouds of vapour which ascended through the crevices, that the females were compelled to seek a refuge in the attic. Here the openings in the roof, and a swift current of air, relieved them in some degree from its annoyance.

When it was found that the command of the well afforded the besieged the means of protecting the wood-work of the interior, an effort was made to cut off the communication with the water, by forcing a passage into the circular stone shaft, through which it was drawn into the room above. This attempt was defeated by the readiness of the youths, who soon cut holes in the floor, whence they sent down certain

death on all beneath. Perhaps no part of the assault was more obstinate than that which accompanied this effort, nor did either assailants or assailed, at any time during its continuance, suffer greater personal injury. After a long and fierce struggle the resistance was effectual, and the savages had recourse to new schemes in order to effect their ruthless object.

During the first moments of their entrance, and with a view to reap the fruits of the victory when the garrison should be more effectually subdued, most of the furniture of the dwelling had been scattered by the conquerors on the side of the hill. Among other articles, some six or seven beds had been dragged from the dormitories. These were now brought into play, as powerful instruments in the assault. They were cast, one by one, on the still burning though smothered flames, in the basement of the block, whence they sent up a cloud of their intolerable effluvia. At this trying mo-

ment the appalling cry was heard in the block, that the well had failed ! The buckets ascended as empty as they went down, and they were thrown aside as no longer useful. The savages seemed to comprehend their advantage, for they profited by the confusion that succeeded among the assailed, to feed the slumbering fires. The flames kindled fiercely, and in less than a minute they became too violent to be subdued. They were soon seen playing on the planks of the floor above. The subtle element flashed from point to point, and it was not long, ere it was stealing up the outer side of the heated block itself.

The savages now knew that conquest was sure. Yells and whoopings proclaimed the fierce delight with which they witnessed the certainty of their victory. Still there was something portentous in the death-like silence with which the victims within the block awaited their fate. The whole exterior of the building

was already wrapped in flames, and yet no shew of further resistance, no petition for mercy, issued from its bosom. The unnatural and frightful stillness that reigned within was gradually communicated to those without. The cries and shouts of triumph ceased, and the crackling of the flames, or the falling of timber in the adjoining buildings, alone disturbed the awful calm. At length a solitary voice was heard in the block. Its tones were deep, solemn, and imploring. The fierce beings who surrounded the glowing pile bent forward to listen, for their quick faculties caught the first sounds that were audible. It was Mark Heathcote, pouring out his spirit in prayer. The petition was fervent, but steady ; and though uttered in words that were unintelligible to those without, they knew enough of the practices of the colonists to be aware that it was the chief of the pale-faces holding communion with his God. Partly in awe, and partly in doubt of what

might be the consequences of so mysterious an asking, the dark crowd withdrew to a little distance, and silently watched the progress of the destruction. They had heard strange sayings of the power of the Deity of their invaders, and as their victims appeared suddenly to cease using any of the known means of safety, they appeared to expect, perhaps they did expect, some unequivocal manifestation of the power of the Great Spirit of the stranger.

Still no sign of pity, no relenting from the ruthless barbarity of their warfare, escaped any of the assailants. If they thought at all of the temporal fate of those who might still exist within the fiery pile, it was only to indulge in some passing regret that the obstinacy of the defence had deprived them of the glory of bearing the usual bloody tokens of victory in triumph to their villages. But even these peculiar and deeply-rooted feelings were forgotten, as the progress of the flames placed

the hope of its indulgence beyond all possibility.

The roof of the block re-kindled, and, by the light that shone through the loops, it was but too evident the interior was in a blaze. Once or twice, smothered sounds came out of the place, as if suppressed shrieks were escaping the females; but they ceased so suddenly as to leave doubts among the auditors whether it were more than the deception of their own excited fancies. The savages had witnessed many a similar scene of human suffering, but never one before in which death was met by so unmoved a calmness. The serenity that reigned in the blazing block communicated to them a feeling of awe, and when the pile came a tumbling and blackened mass of ruins to the earth, they avoided the place, like men that dreaded the vengeance of a Deity who knew how to infuse so deep a sentiment of resignation in the breasts of his worshippers.

Though the yells of victory were again heard in the valley that night, and though the sun had arisen before the conquerors deserted the hill, but few of the band found resolution to approach the smouldering pile, where they had witnessed so impressive an exhibition of Christian fortitude. The few that did draw near stood around the spot, rather in the reverence with which an Indian visits the graves of the just, than in the fierce rejoicings with which he is known to glut his revenge over a fallen enemy.

CHAPTER VI.

“What are these,
So withered, and so wild in their attire;
That look not like the inhabitants of earth,
And yet are on’t?”

Macbeth.

THAT sternness of the season, which has already been mentioned in these pages, is never of long continuance in the month of April. A change in the wind had been noted by the hunters, even before they retired from their range among the hills; and though too seriously occu-

plied to pay close attention to the progress of the thaw, more than one of the young men had found occasion to remark that the final breaking up of the winter had arrived. Long ere the scene of the preceding chapter reached its height, the southern winds had mingled with the heat of the conflagration. Warm airs, that had been following the course of the Gulf Stream, were driven to the land, and sweeping over the narrow island, that at this point forms the advanced work of the continent, but a few short hours had passed before they destroyed every chilling remnant of the dominion of winter. Warm, bland, and rushing in torrents, the subtle currents penetrated the forests, melted the snows from the fields, and as all alike felt the genial influence, it appeared to bestow a renovated existence on man and beast. With morning, therefore, a landscape, very different from that last placed before the mind

of the reader, presented itself in the valley of the Wish-Ton-Wish.

The winter had entirely disappeared, and as the buds had begun to swell under the occasional warmth of the spring, one ignorant of the past would not have supposed that the advance of the season had been subject to so stern an interruption. But the principal and most melancholy change was in the more artificial parts of the view. Instead of those simple and happy habitations which had crowned the little eminence, there remained only a mass of blackened and charred ruins. A few abused and half destroyed articles of household furniture lay scattered on the sides of the hill, and, here and there, a dozen palisadoes, favoured by some accidental cause, had partially escaped the flames. Eight or ten massive and dreary-looking stacks of chimneys rose out of the smoking piles. In the centre of the desolation was the stone basement of the block-

house, on which still stood a few gloomy masses of the timber, resembling coal. The naked and unsupported shaft of the well reared its circular pillar from the centre, looking like a dark monument of the past. The wide ruin of the out-buildings blackened one side of the clearing, and, in different places, the fences, like radii diverging from the common centre of destruction, had led off the flames into the fields. A few domestic animals ruminated in the back-ground, and even the feathered inhabitants of the barns still kept aloof, as if warned by their instinct that danger lurked around the site of their ancient abodes. In all other respects the view was calm, and lovely as ever. The sun shone from a sky in which no cloud was visible. The blandness of the winds, and the brightness of the heavens, lent an air of animation to even the leafless forest: and the white vapour, that continued to rise from the smouldering piles, floated high

over the hills, as the peaceful smoke of the cottage curls above its roof.

The ruthless band which had occasioned this sudden change was already far on the way to its villages, or, haply, it sought some other scene of blood. A skilful eye might have traced the route these fierce creatures of the woods had taken, by fences hurled from their places, or by the carcass of some animal that had fallen, in the wantonness of victory, beneath a parting blow. Of all these wild beings one only remained; and he appeared to linger at the spot in the indulgence of feelings that were foreign to those passions that had so recently stirred the bosoms of his comrades.

It was with a slow, noiseless step that the solitary loiterer moved about the scene of destruction. He was first seen treading, with a thoughtful air, among the ruins of the buildings that had formed the quadrangle, and then, seemingly led by an interest in the fate of those

who had so miserably perished, he drew nearer to the pile in its centre. The nicest and most attentive ear could not have detected the fall of his foot, as the Indian placed it within the gloomy circle of the ruined wall, nor is the breathing of the infant less audible, than the manner in which he drew breath while standing in a place so lately consecrated by the agony and martyrdom of a Christian family. It was the boy called Miantonimoh, seeking some melancholy memorial of those with whom he had so long dwelt in amity, if not in confidence.

One skilled in the history of savage passions might have found a clue to the workings of the mind of the youth in the play of his speaking features. As his dark glittering eye rolled over the smouldering fragments, it seemed to search keenly for some vestige of the human form. The element, however, had done its work too greedily to have left many visible memorials of

its fury. An object resembling that he sought, however, caught his glance, and stepping lightly to the spot where it lay, he raised the bone of a powerful arm from the brands. The flashing of his eye as it lighted on this sad object, was wild and exulting, like that of the savage when he first feels the fierce joy of gluttled vengeance; but gentler recollections came with the gaze, and kinder feelings evidently usurped the place of the hatred he had been taught to bear a race who were so fast sweeping his people from the earth. The relic fell from his hand, and had Ruth been there to witness the melancholy and relenting shade that clouded his swarthy features, she might have found pleasure in the certainty that all her kindness had not been wasted.

Regret soon gave place to awe. To the imagination of the Indian, it seemed as if a still voice, like that which is believed to issue from the grave, was heard in the place. Bending

his body forward, he listened with the intensity and acuteness of a savage. He thought the smothered tones of Mark Heathcote were again audible, holding communion with his God. The chisel of the Grecian would have loved to delineate the attitudes and movements of the wondering boy as he slowly and reverently withdrew from the spot. His look was rivetted on the vacancy, where the upper apartments of the block had stood, and where he had last seen the family, calling in their extremity on their Deity for aid. Imagination still painted the victims in their burning pile. For a minute longer, during which brief space the young Indian probably expected to see some vision of the pale-faces, did he linger near; and then, with a musing air and softened mind, he trod lightly along the path which led on the trail of his people. When his active form reached the boundary of the forest, he again paused, and taking a final gaze at the place, where fortune

had made him a witness of so much domestic peace, and of so much sudden misery, his form was quickly swallowed in the gloom of his native woods.

The work of the savages now seemed complete. An effectual check appeared to be placed to the further progress of civilization in the ill-fated valley of the Wish-Ton-Wish. Had nature been left to its own work, a few years would have covered the deserted clearing with its ancient vegetation; and half a century would have again buried the whole of its quiet glades in the shadows of the forest. But it was otherwise decreed.

The sun had reached the meridian, and the hostile band had been gone some hours, before aught occurred likely to effect this seeming decision of Providence. To one acquainted with the recent horrors, the breathing of the airs over the ruins might have passed for the whisperings of departed spirits. In short, it

appeared as if the silence of the wilderness had once more resumed its reign, when it was suddenly though slightly interrupted. A movement was made within the ruins of the block. It sounded as if billets of wood were gradually and cautiously displaced, and then a human head was reared slowly, and with marked suspicion, above the shaft of the well. The wild and unearthly air of this seeming spectre, was in keeping with the rest of the scene. A face begrimed with smoke and stained with blood, a head bound in some fragment of a soiled dress, and eyes that were glaring in a species of dull horror, were objects in unison with all the other frightful accessories of the place.

“What seest thou?” demanded a deep voice from within the walls of the shaft. “Shall we again come to our weapons, or have the agents of Moloch departed? Speak, entranced youth, what dost behold?”

“A sight to make a wolf weep!” returned Eben Dudley, raising his large frame so as to stand erect on the shaft, where he commanded a bird’s eye view of most of the desolation of the valley. “Evil though it be, we may not say that forewarning signs have been withheld. But what is the cunningest man when mortal wisdom is weighed in the scale against the craft of devils! Come forth; Belial hath done his worst, and we have a breathing time.”

The sounds, which issued still deeper from the well, denoted the satisfaction with which this intelligence was received, no less than the alacrity with which the summons of the borderer was obeyed. Sundry blocks of wood and short pieces of plank were first passed, with care, up to the hands of Dudley, who cast them, like useless lumber, among the other ruins of the building. He then descended from his perch, and made room for others to follow.

The stranger next arose; after him came Content, the Puritan, Reuben Ring, and, in short, all the youths, with the exception of those who had, unhappily, fallen in the contest. After these had mounted, and each in turn had leaped to the ground, a very brief preparation served for the liberation of the more feeble of body. The readiness of border skill soon sufficed to arrange the necessary means. By the aid of chains and buckets, Ruth and the little Martha, Faith, and all the hand-maidens, without even one exception, were successively drawn from the bowels of the earth, and restored to the light of day. It is scarcely necessary to say, to those whom experience has best fitted to judge of such an achievement, that no great time or labour was necessary for its accomplishment.

It is not our intention to harass the feelings of the reader, further than is required, by a simple narrative of the incidents of the legend.

We shall, therefore, say nothing of the bodily pain, or of the mental alarm, by which this ingenious retreat, from the flames and the tomahawk, had been effected. The suffering was chiefly confined to apprehension, for as the descent was easy, so had the readiness and ingenuity of the young men found means, by the aid of articles of furniture first cast into the shaft, and by well secured fragments of the floors properly placed across, both to render the situation of the females and children less painful than might at first be supposed, and effectually to protect them from the tumbling block. But little of the latter, however, was likely to affect their safety, as the form of the building was, in itself, a sufficient security against the fall of its heavier parts.

The meeting of the family, amid the desolation of the valley, though relieved by the consciousness of having escaped a more shock-

ing fate, may easily be imagined. The first act was to render brief but solemn thanks for their deliverance, and then, with the promptitude of people trained in hardship, their attention was given to those measures which prudence told them were yet necessary.

A few of the more active and experienced of the youths were despatched, in order to ascertain the direction taken by the Indians, and to gain what intelligence they might concerning their future movements. The maidens hastened to collect the kine, while others searched, with heavy hearts, among the ruins, in quest of such articles of food and comfort as could be found, in order to administer to the first wants of nature.

Two hours had effected most of that which could immediately be done in these several pursuits. The young men returned with the assurance that the trails announced the certain and final retreat of the savages. The cows

had yielded their tribute, and such provision had been made against hunger, as circumstances would allow. The arms had been examined, and put, as far as the injuries they had received would admit, in readiness for instant service. A few hasty preparations had been made, in order to protect the females against the cool airs of the coming night ; and, in short, all was done that the intelligence of a border-man could suggest, or his exceeding readiness in expedients could, in so brief a space, supply.

The sun began to fall towards the tops of the beeches that crowned the western outline of the view, before all these necessary arrangements were ended. It was not till then, however, that Reuben Ring, accompanied by another youth of equal activity and courage, appeared before the Puritan, equipped, as well as men in their situation might be, for a journey through the forest.

“Go,” said the old religionist, when the youths presented themselves before him ; “go ; carry forth the tidings of this visitation, that men come to our succour. I ask not vengeance on the deluded and heathenish imitators of the worshippers of Moloch. They have ignorantly done this evil. Let no man arm in behalf of the wrongs of one sinful and erring. Rather let them look into the secret abominations of their own hearts, in order that they crush the living worm, which, by gnawing on the seeds of a healthful hope, may yet destroy the fruits of the promise in their own souls. I would that there be profit in this example of divine displeasure. Go ; make the circuit of the settlements for some fifty miles, and bid such of the neighbours as may be spared come to our aid. They shall be welcome, and may it be long ere any of them send invitation to me or mine to enter their clearings on the like melancholy duty. Depart ; and bear in

mind, that you are messengers of peace ; that your errand toucheth not the feelings of vengeance ; but that it is succour, in all fitting reason, and no arming of the hand to chase the savage to his retreats, that I ask of the brethren."

With this final admonition, the young men took their leaves. Still it was evident, by their frowning brows and compressed lips, that some part of its forgiving principle might be forgotten, should chance, in their journey, bring them on the trail of any wandering inhabitant of the forest. In a few minutes they were seen passing, with swift steps, from the fields into the depths of the forest, along that path which led to the towns that lay lower on the Connecticut.

Another task still remained to be performed. In making the temporary arrangements for the shelter of the family, attention had been first paid to the block-house. The walls of the

basement of this building were still standing, and it was found easy, by means of half-burnt timbers, with an occasional board that had escaped the conflagration, to cover it, in a manner that offered a temporary protection against the weather. This simple and hasty construction, with an extremely inartificial office erected around the stack of a chimney, embraced nearly all that could be done, until time and assistance should enable them to commence other dwellings. In clearing the ruins of the little tower of its rubbish, the remains of those who had perished in the fray were piously collected. The body of the youth who had died in the earlier hours of the attack, was found, but half consumed, in the court; and the bones of two more who fell within the block were collected from among the ruins. It had now become a melancholy duty to consign them all to the earth, with decent solemnity.

The time selected for this sad office was just

as the western horizon began to glow, with that which one of our own poets has so beautifully termed, "the pomp that brings and shuts the day." The sun was in the tree-tops, and a softer or sweeter light could not have been chosen for such a ceremony. Most of the fields still lay in the soft brightness of the hour, though the forest was rapidly getting the more obscure look of night. A broad and gloomy margin was spreading from the boundary of the woods, and, here and there, a solitary tree cast its shadow on the meadows without its limits, throwing a dark ragged line, in bold relief, on the glow of the sun's rays. One—it was the dusky image of a high and waving pine, that reared its dark green pyramid of never-fading foliage nearly a hundred feet above the humbler growth of beeches—cast its shade to the side of the eminence of the block. Here the pointed extremity of the shadow was seen stealing slowly towards the open grave, an

emblem of that oblivion in which its humble tenants were so shortly to be wrapped.

At this spot Mark Heathcote and his remaining companions had assembled. An oaken chair, saved from the flames, was the seat of the father, and two parallel benches, formed of planks, placed on stones, held the other members of the family. The grave lay between. The patriarch had taken his station at one of its ends, while the stranger, so often named in these pages, stood, with folded arms and a thoughtful brow, at the other. The bridle of a horse, caparisoned in that imperfect manner which the straitened means of the borderers now rendered necessary, was hanging from one of the half-burnt palisadoes, in the back ground.

“A just but a merciful hand hath been laid heavily on my household,” commenced the old Puritan, with the calmness of one who had long been accustomed to chasten his regrets by humility. “He that hath given freely, hath taken

away; and One, that hath long smiled upon my weakness, hath now veiled his face in anger. I have known him in his power to bless; it was meet that I should see him in his displeasure. A heart that was waxing confident would have hardened in its pride. At that which hath befallen let no man murmur. Let none imitate the speech of her who spoke foolishly. 'What! shall we receive good at the hand of God; and shall we not receive evil?' I would that the feeble minded of the world, they that jeopard the soul on vanities, they that look with scorn on the neediness of the flesh, might behold the riches of one steadfast. I would that they might know the consolation of the righteous! Let the voice of thanksgiving be heard in the wilderness. Open thy mouths in praise, that the gratitude of a penitent be not hid!"

As the deep tones of the speaker ceased, his stern eye fell upon the features of the nearest youth, and it seemed to demand an audible

response to his own lofty expression of resignation. But the sacrifice exceeded the power of the individual to whom had been made this silent, but intelligible, appeal. After regarding the relics that lay at his feet, casting a wandering glance at the desolation which had swept over a place his own hand had helped to decorate, and receiving a renewed consciousness of his own bodily suffering in the shooting pain of his wounds, the young borderer averted his look, and seemed to recoil from so officious a display of submission. Observing his inability to reply, Mark continued :—

“ Hath no one a voice to praise the Lord ?
The bands of the heathen have fallen upon my
herds ; the brand hath been kindled within my
dwellings ; my people have died by the violence
of the unenlightened, and none are here to say
that the Lord is just ! I would that the shouts
of thanksgiving should arise in my fields ! I
would that the song of praise should grow

louder than the whoop of the savage, and that all the land might speak joyfulness!"

A long, deep, and expecting pause succeeded. Then Content rejoined, in his quiet tones, speaking firmly, but with the modest utterance he rarely failed to use:—

"The hand that hath held the balance is just," he said, "and we have been found wanting. He that made the wilderness blossom hath caused the ignorant and the barbarous to be the instruments of his will. He hath arrested the season of our prosperity, that we may know he is the Lord. He hath spoken in the whirlwind, but his mercy granteth that our ears shall know his voice."

As his son ceased, a gleam of satisfaction shot across the countenance of the Puritan. His eye next turned inquiringly towards Ruth, who sate among her maidens, the image of womanly sorrow. Common interest seemed to still the breathing of the little assembly; and sympathy

was quite as active as curiosity, when each one present suffered a glance to steal towards her benignant but pallid face. The eye of the mother was gazing earnestly, but without a tear, on the melancholy spectacle before her. It unconsciously sought, among the dried and shrivelled remnants of mortality that lay at her feet, some relic of the cherub she had lost. A shudder and struggle followed; after which her gentle voice breathed, so low that those nearest her person could scarce distinguish the words—

“The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be his holy name!”

“Now know I that he who hath smote me is merciful, for he chasteneth them he loveth,” said Mark Heathcote, rising with dignity to address his household. “Our life is a life of pride. The young are wont to wax insolent, while he of many years saith to his own heart, ‘it is good to be here.’ There is a fearful mystery in One who sitteth on high. The heavens are his throne,

and he hath created the earth for his footstool. Let not the vanity of the weak of mind presume to understand it, for 'who that hath the breath of life lived before the hills! The bonds of the evil one, of Satan, and of the sons of Belial, have been loosened, that the faith of the elect may be purified—that the names of those written since the foundations of the earth were laid, may be read in letters of pure gold. The time of man is but a moment in the reckoning of Him whose life is eternity,—earth, the habitation of a season. The bones of the bold, of the youthful, and of the strong of yesterday, lie at our feet. None know what an hour may bring forth. In a single night, my children, hath this been done. They whose voices were heard in my halls are now speechless; and they who so lately rejoiced are sorrowing. Yet hath this seeming evil been ordered that good may come thereof. We are dwellers in a wild and distant land," he continued, insensibly permitting his thoughts to incline to-

wards the more mournful details of their affliction ; “ our earthly home is afar off. Hither have we been led by the flaming pillar of truth, and yet the malice of the persecutors hath not forgotten to follow. One, houseless, and sought like the hunted deer, is again driven to flee. We have the canopy of the stars for a roof ; none may tarry longer to worship secretly within our walls. But the path of the faithful, though full of thorns, leadeth to quiet ; and the final rest of the just man can never know alarm. He that hath borne hunger and thirst, and the pains of the flesh, for the sake of truth, knoweth how to be satisfied ; nor will the hours of bodily suffering be accounted weary, to him whose goal is the peace of the righteous.” The strong lineaments of the stranger grew even more than usually austere ; and as the Puritan continued, the hand, which rested on the handle of a pistol, grasped the weapon, until the fingers seemed imbedded in the wood. He bowed, however, as if to acknow-

ledge the personal allusion, and remained silent. "If any mourn the early death of those who have rendered up their being, struggling, as it may be permitted, in behalf of life and dwelling," continued Mark Heathcote, regarding a female near him, "let her remember, that from the beginning of the world were his days numbered, and that not a sparrow falleth without answering the ends of wisdom. Rather let the fulfilment of things remind us of the vanity of life, that we may learn how easy it is to become immortal. If the youth hath been cut down, seemingly like unripened grass, he hath fallen by the sickle of One who knoweth best when to begin the ingathering of the harvest to his eternal garner. Though a spirit, bound unto his, as one feeble is wont to lean on the strength of man, mourn over his fall, let her sorrow be mingled with rejoicing." A convulsive sob broke out of the bosom of the hand-maiden who was known to have been affianced to one of the dead, and for a moment the

address of Mark was interrupted. But when silence again ensued, he continued; the subject leading him, by a transition that was natural, to allude to his own sorrows. "Death hath been no stranger in my habitation," he said; "his shaft fell heaviest when it struck her who, like those that have here fallen, was in the pride of her youth, and when her soul was glad with the first joy of the birth of a man-child. Thou who sittest on high!" he added, turning a glazed and tearless eye to heaven, "thou knowest how heavy was that blow; and thou hast written down the strivings of an oppressed soul. The burthen was not found too heavy for endurance. The sacrifice hath not sufficed; the world was again getting uppermost in my heart. Thou didst bestow an image of that innocence and loveliness that dwelleth in the skies; and this hast thou taken away, that we might know thy power. To this judgment we bow: if thou hast called our child to the mansions of bliss, she is wholly

thine, and we presume not to complain; but if thou hast still left her to wander further in the pilgrimage of life, we confide in thy goodness. She is of a long suffering race, and thou wilt not desert her to the blindness of the heathen. She is thine, she is wholly thine, King of Heaven! and yet hast thou permitted our hearts to yearn towards her, with the fondness of earthly love. We await some further manifestation of thy will, that we may know whether the fountains of our affection shall be dried, in the certainty of her blessedness—" (scalding tears were rolling down the cheeks of the pallid and immovable mother) "or whether hope, nay, whether duty to thee calleth for the interference of those bound to her in the tenderness of the flesh. When the blow was heaviest on the bruised spirit of a lone and solitary wanderer, in a strange and savage land, he held not back the offspring it was thy will to grant him in the place of her called to thyself; and

now that child hath become a man, he too layeth, like Abraham of old, the infant of his love, a willing offering at thy feet. Do with it as to thy never failing wisdom seemeth best—”

The words were interrupted by a heavy groan that burst from the chest of Content. A deep silence ensued, but when the assembly ventured to throw looks of sympathy and awe at the bereaved father, they saw that he had arisen, and stood gazing steadily at the speaker, as if he wondered, equally with the others, whence such a sound of suffering could have come. The Puritan renewed the subject, but his voice faltered, and for an instant, as he proceeded, his hearers were oppressed with the spectacle of an aged and dignified man shaken with grief. Conscious of his weakness, the old man ceased speaking in exhortation, and addressed himself to prayer. While thus engaged, his tones became clear, firm, and distinct, and the

petition was ended in the midst of a deep and holy calm.

With the performance of this preliminary office, the simple ceremony was brought to its close. The remains were lowered, in solemn silence, into the grave, and the earth was soon replaced by the young men. Mark Heathcote then invoked aloud the blessing of God on his household, and bowing in person, as he had before done in spirit, to the will of Heaven, he motioned to the family to withdraw.

The interview that succeeded was over the resting place of the dead. The hand of the stranger was firmly clenched in that of the Puritan, and the stern self-command of both appeared to give way before the regrets of a friendship that had endured through so many trying scenes.

“Thou knowest that I may not tarry,” said the former, as if he replied to some expressed wish of his companion. “They would make

me a sacrifice to the Moloch of their vanities, and yet would I fain abide, until the weight of this heavy blow may be forgotten. I found thee in peace, and I quit thee in the depths of suffering!"

"Thou distrustest me, or thou dost injustice to thine own belief," interrupted the Puritan, with a smile that shone on his haggard and austere visage, as the rays of the setting sun light a wintry cloud. "Seemed I happier when this hand placed that of a loved bride into mine own, than thou now seest me in this wilderness, houseless, stripped of my wealth, and, God forgive the ingratitude! but I had almost said, childless? No, indeed, thou mayest not tarry, for the bloodhounds of tyranny will be on their scent; here is shelter no longer."

The eyes of both turned, by a common and melancholy feeling, towards the ruin of the block. The stranger then pressed the hand

of his friend in both his own, and said, in a struggling voice—

“ Mark Heathcote, adieu ; he that had a roof for the persecuted wanderer shall not long be houseless ; neither shall the resigned for ever know sorrow.”

His words sounded in the ears of his companion like the revelation of a prophecy. They again pressed their hands together, and, regarding each other with looks, in which kindness could not be altogether smothered by the repulsive character of an acquired air, they parted. The Puritan slowly took his way to the dreary shelter which covered his family, while the stranger was shortly after seen urging the beast he had mounted, across the pastures of the valley, towards one of the most retired paths of the wilderness.

CHAPTER VII.

“ Together towards the village then we walked,
And of old friends and places much we talked ;
And who had died, who left them would he tell,
And who still in their father’s mansion dwell.”

DANA.

WE leave the imagination of the reader to supply an interval of several years. Before the thread of the narrative shall be resumed, it will be necessary to take another hasty view of the condition of the country in which the scene of our legend had place.

The exertions of the provincials were no longer limited to the first efforts of a colonial existence. The establishments of New England had passed the ordeal of experiment, and were become permanent. Massachusetts was already populous; and Connecticut, the colony with which we have more immediate connection, was sufficiently peopled to manifest a portion of that enterprise which has since made her active little community so remarkable. The effects of these increased exertions were becoming extensively visible, and we shall endeavour to set one of these changes, as distinctly as our feeble powers will allow, before the eyes of those who read these pages.

When compared with the progress of society in the other hemisphere, the condition of what is called in America a new settlement becomes anomalous. There the arts of life have been the fruits of an intelligence that has progressively accumulated with the advancement of

civilization ; while here, improvement is, in a great degree, the consequence of experience elsewhere acquired. Necessity, prompted by an understanding of its wants, incited by a commendable spirit of emulation, and encouraged by liberty, early gave birth to those improvements, which have converted a wilderness into the abodes of abundance and security, with a rapidity that wears the appearance of magic. Industry has wrought with the confidence of knowledge, and the result has been peculiar.

It is scarcely necessary to say that, in a country where the laws favour all commendable enterprise, where unnecessary artificial restrictions are unknown, and where the hand of man has not yet exhausted its efforts, the adventurer is allowed the greatest freedom of choice, in selecting the field of his enterprise. The agriculturist passes the heath and the barren, to seat himself on the river bottom ; the trader looks for the sight of demand and supply, and the

artizan quits his native village to seek employment in situations where labour will meet its fullest reward. It is a consequence of this extraordinary freedom of election, that, while the great picture of American society has been sketched with so much boldness, a large portion of the filling up still remains to be done. The emigrant has consulted his immediate interests, and while no very extensive and profitable territory, throughout the whole of our immense possessions, has been wholly neglected, neither has any particular district yet attained the finish of improvement. The city is, even now, seen in the wilderness, and the wilderness often continues near the city, while the latter is sending forth its swarms to distant scenes of industry. After thirty years of fostering care on the part of the government, the capital itself presents its disjointed and sickly villages, in the centre of the deserted 'old-fields' of Maryland, while numberless youthful rivals are flourishing, on

the waters of the west, in spots where the bear has ranged and the wolf howled, long since the former has been termed a city.

Thus it is that high civilization, a state of infant existence, and positive barbarity, are often brought so near each other, within the borders of this republic. The traveller who has passed the night in an inn that would not disgrace the oldest country in Europe, may be compelled to dine in the shantee* of a hunter ; the smooth and gravelled road sometimes ends in an impassable swamp ; the spires of the town are often hid by the branches of a tangled forest, and the canal leads to a seemingly barren and unprofitable mountain. He that does not re-

* Shanty, or Shantec, is a word much used in the newer settlements. It strictly means a rude cabin of bark and brush, such as are often erected in the forest for temporary purposes. But the borderers often quaintly apply it to their own habitations. The only derivation which the writer has heard for this American word, is one that supposes it to be a corruption of *Chienté*, a term said to be used among the Canadians to express a dog-kennel.

turn to see what another year may bring forth, commonly bears away from these scenes recollections that conduce to error. To see America with the eyes of truth, it is necessary to look often; and in order to understand the actual condition of these states, it should be remembered, that it is equally unjust to believe that all the intermediate points partake of the improvements of particular places, as to infer the want of civilization at more remote establishments, from a few unfavourable facts gleaned near the centre. By an accidental concurrence of moral and physical causes, much of that equality which distinguishes the institutions of the country is extended to the progress of society over its whole surface.

Although the impetus of improvement was not as great in the time of Mark Heathcote as in our own days, the principle of its power was actively in existence. Of this fact we shall furnish a sufficient evidence, by pursuing our

intention of describing one of those changes to which allusion has already been made.

The reader will remember, that the age of which we write had advanced into the last quarter of the seventeenth century. The precise moment at which the action of the tale must re-commence, was that period of the day when the grey of twilight was redeeming objects from the deep darkness with which the night draws to its close. The month was June, and the scene such as it may be necessary to describe with some particularity.

Had there been light, and had one been favourably placed to enjoy a bird's-eye view of the spot, he would have seen a broad and undulating field of leafy forest, in which the various deciduous trees of New England were relieved by the deeper verdure of occasional masses of evergreens. In the centre of this swelling and nearly interminable outline of woods, was a valley, that spread between three

low mountains. Over the bottom-land, for the distance of several miles, all the signs of a settlement in a state of rapid and prosperous improvement were visible. The devious course of a deep and swift brook, that in the other hemisphere would have been termed a river, was to be traced through the meadows, by its borders of willow and sumach. At a point near the centre of the valley, the waters had been arrested by a small dam ; and a mill, whose wheel at that early hour was without motion, stood on the artificial mound. Near it was the site of a New England hamlet.

The number of dwellings in the village might have been forty. They were, as usual, constructed of a firm framework, neatly covered with slidings of boards. There was a surprising air of equality in the general aspect of the houses ; and, if there were question of any country but our own, it might be added there was an unusual appearance of comfort and

abundance in even the humblest of them all. They were mostly of two low stories, the superior overhanging the inferior by a foot or two ; a mode of construction much in use in the earlier days of the Eastern Colonies. As paint was but little used at that time, none of the buildings exhibited a colour different from that the wood would naturally assume, after the exposure of a few years to the weather. Each had its single chimney in the centre of the roof, and but two or three showed more than a solitary window on each side of the principal or outer door. In front of every dwelling was a small, neat court, in greensward, separated from the public road by a light fence of deal. Double rows of young and vigorous elms lined each side of the wide street, while an enormous sycamore still kept possession of the spot, in its centre, which it had occupied when the white man entered the forest. Beneath the shade of this tree, the inhabitants often collected to gather

tidings of each other's welfare, or to listen to some matter of interest that rumour had borne from the towns nearer the sea. A narrow and little-used wheel-track ran, with a graceful and sinuous route, through the centre of the wide and grassy street. Reduced in appearance to little more than a bridle-path, it was to be traced without the hamlet, between high fences of wood for a mile or two, to the points where it entered the forest. Here and there roses were pressing through the openings of the fences before the doors of the different habitations, and bushes of fragrant lilacs stood in the angles of most of the courts.

The dwellings were detached. Each occupied its own insulated plot of ground, with a garden in its rear. The out-buildings were thrown to that distance which the cheapness of land and security from fire rendered both easy and expedient.

The church stood in the centre of the high-

way, and near one end of the hamlet. In the exterior and ornaments of the important temple, the taste of the times had been fastidiously consulted, its form and simplicity furnishing no slight resemblance to the self-denying doctrines and quaint humours of the religionists who worshipped beneath its roof. The building, like all the rest, was of wood, and externally of two stories. It possessed a tower, without a spire; the former alone serving to betray its sacred character. In the construction of this edifice especial care had been taken to eschew all deviations from direct lines and right angles. Those narrow arched passages for the admission of light that are elsewhere so common, were then thought, by the stern moralists of New England, to have some mysterious connexion with her of the scarlet mantle. The priest would as soon have thought of appearing before his flock in the vanities of stole and cassock, as the congregation of admitting the repudiated ornaments

into the outline of their severe architecture. Had the Genii of the Lamp suddenly exchanged the windows of the sacred edifice with those of the inn that stood nearly opposite, the closest critic of the settlement could never have detected the liberty, since in the form, dimensions, and style of the two, there was no visible difference.

A little inclosure, at no great distance from the church, and on one side of the street, had been set apart for the final resting place of those who had finished their race on earth. It contained but a solitary grave.

The inn was to be distinguished from the surrounding buildings by its superior size, an open horse-shed, and a sort of protruding air, with which it thrust itself on the line of the street, as if to invite the traveller to enter. A sign swung on a gallows-looking post, that, in consequence of frosty nights and warm days, had already deviated from the perpendicular.

It bore a conceit that, at the first glance, might have gladdened the heart of a naturalist with the belief that he had made the discovery of some unknown bird. The artist, however, had sufficiently provided against the consequences of so embarrassing a blunder, by considerately writing beneath the offspring of his pencil, "This is the sign of the Whip-Poor-Will;" a name that the most unlettered traveller in those regions would be likely to know was vulgarly given to the Wish-Ton-Wish, or the American night-hawk.

But few relics of the forest remained immediately around the hamlet. The trees had long been felled, and sufficient time had elapsed to remove most of the vestiges of their former existence. But as the eye receded from the cluster of buildings, the signs of more recent inroads on the wilderness became apparent, until the view terminated with openings, in which piled

logs and mazes of felled trees announced the recent use of the axe.

At that early day, the American husbandman, like the agriculturists of most of Europe, dwelt in his village. The dread of violence from the savages had given rise to a custom similar to that which, centuries before, had been produced in the other hemisphere by the inroads of more pretending barbarians, and which, with few and distant exceptions, has deprived rural scenery of a charm that, it would seem, time and a better condition of society are slow to repair. Some remains of this ancient practice are still to be traced in the portion of the Union of which we write, where, even at this day, the farmer often quits the village to seek his scattered fields in its neighbourhood. Still, as man has never been the subject of a system here, and as each individual has always had the liberty of consulting his own temper, bolder spirits early began to break through a practice, by which

quite as much was lost in convenience as was gained in security. Even in the scene we have been describing, ten or twelve humble habitations were distributed among the recent clearings on the sides of the mountains, and in situations too remote to promise much security against any sudden inroad of the common enemy.

For general protection in cases of the last extremity, however, a stockaded dwelling, not unlike that which we have had occasion to describe in our earlier pages, stood in a convenient spot near the hamlet. Its defences were stronger and more elaborate than usual, the pickets being furnished with flanking block-houses; and, in other respects, the building bore the aspect of a work equal to any resistance that might be required in the warfare of those regions. The ordinary habitation of the priest was within its gates, and hither most of the sick were timely

conveyed, in order to anticipate the necessity of removals at more inconvenient moments.

It is scarcely necessary to tell the American, that heavy wooden fences subdivided the whole of this little landscape, in enclosures of some eight or ten acres in extent; that, here and there, cattle and flocks were grazing without herdsmen or shepherds, and, that, while the fields nearest to the dwellings were beginning to assume the appearance of a careful and improved husbandry, those more remote became gradually wilder and less cultivated, until the half reclaimed openings, with their blackened stubs and barked trees, were blended with the gloom of the living forest. These are, more or less, the accompaniments of every rural scene, in districts of the country where time has not yet effected more than the first two stages of improvement.

At the distance of a short half mile from the fortified house, or garrison, as, by a singular corruption of terms, the stockaded building was

called, stood a dwelling of pretensions altogether superior to any in the hamlet. The buildings in question, though simple, were extensive, and though scarcely other than such as might belong to an agriculturist in easy circumstances, still they were remarkable, in that settlement, by the comforts which time alone could accumulate, and some of which denoted an advanced condition for a frontier family. In short, there was an air about the establishment, as in the disposition of its out-buildings, in the superior workmanship, in the materials, and in numberless other well known circumstances, which went to show that the whole of the edifices were reconstructions. The fields near this habitation exhibited smoother surfaces than those in the distance; the fences were lighter and less rude; the stumps had absolutely disappeared, and the gardens and homestead were well planted with flourishing fruit-trees. A conical eminence arose, at a short distance, in the rear of the

principal dwelling. It was covered with that beautiful and peculiar ornament of an American farm, a regular thrifty and luxuriant apple orchard. Still age had not given its full beauty to the plantation, which might have had a growth of some eight or ten years. A blackened tower of stone, which sustained the charred ruins of a superstructure of wood, though of no great height in itself, rose above the tallest of the trees, and stood a sufficient memorial of some scene of violence in the brief history of the valley. There was also a small block-house near the habitation, but, by the air of neglect that reigned around, it was quite apparent the little work had been of a hurried construction, and of but temporary use. A few young plantations of fruit trees were also to be seen, in different parts of the valley, which was beginning to exhibit many other evidences of an improved agriculture.

So far as all these artificial changes went, they

were of an English character ; but it was England devoid alike of its luxury and its poverty, and with a superfluity of space that gave to the meanest habitation, in the view, an air of abundance and comfort, that is so often wanting, about the dwellings of the comparatively rich, in countries where man is found bearing a far greater numerical proportion to the soil than was then, or is even now, the case in the regions of which we write.

CHAPTER VIII.

“Come hither, neighbour Sea-coal—God hath blessed you with a good name : to be a well favoured man is the gift of Fortune ; but to write and read comes by Nature.”

Much Ado about Nothing.

It has already been said, that the hour at which the action of the tale must recommence was early morning. The usual coolness of night, in a country extensively covered with wood, had passed, and the warmth of a summer morning, in that low latitude, was causing the streaks of

light vapour, that floated about the meadows, to rise above the trees. The feathery patches united to form a cloud that sailed away towards the summit of a distant mountain, which appeared to be a common rendezvous for all the mists that had been generated by the past hours of darkness.

Though the burnished sky announced his near approach, the sun was not yet visible. Notwithstanding the earliness of the hour, a man was already mounting a little ascent in the road, at no great distance from the southern entrance of the hamlet, and at a point where he could command a view of all the objects described in the preceding chapter. A musket thrown across his left shoulder, with the horn and pouch at his sides, together with the little wallet at his back, proclaimed him one who had either been engaged in a hunt, or in some short expedition of even a less peaceable character. His dress was of the usual material and fashion of a

countryman of the age and colony, though a short broadsword, that was thrust through a wampum belt which girded his body, might have attracted observation. In all other respects, he had the air of an inhabitant of the hamlet, who had found occasion to quit his abode on some affair of pleasure, or of duty, that had made no very serious demand on his time.

Whether native or stranger, few ever passed the hillock named without pausing to gaze at the quiet loveliness of the cluster of houses that lay in full view from its summit. The individual mentioned loitered as usual, but, instead of following the line of the path, his eye rather sought some object in the direction of the fields. Moving leisurely to the nearest fence, he threw down the upper rails of a pair of bars, and beckoned to a horseman, who was picking his way across a broken bit of pasture land, to enter the highway by the passage he had opened.

“ Put the spur smartly into the pacer’s flank,” said he who had done this act of civility, observing that the other hesitated to urge his beast across the irregular and somewhat scattered pile ; “ my word for it, the jade goes over them all, without touching with more than three of her four feet. Fie, Doctor, there is never a cow in the Wish-Ton-Wish but it would take the leap to be in the first at the milking.”

“ Softly, Ensign,” returned the timid equestrian, laying the emphasis on the final syllable of his companion’s title, and pronouncing the first as if it were spelt with the third instead of the second vowel ; “ thy courage is meet for one set apart for deeds of valour, but it would be a sorrowful day when the ailing of the valley should knock at my door, and a broken limb be made the apology for want of succour. Thy efforts will not avail thee, man ; for the mare hath had schooling, as well as her master. I have trained the beast to methodical habits, and

she hath come to have a rooted dislike to all irregularities of movement. So cease tugging at the rein, as if thou wouldst compel her to pass the pile in spite of her teeth, and throw down the upper bar altogether."

"A doctor in these rugged parts should be mounted on one of those ambling birds of which we read," said the other, removing the obstacle to the secure passage of his friend; "for truly a journey at night, in the paths of these clearings, is not always as safe moving as that which is said to be enjoyed by the settlers nearer sea."

"And where hast found mention of a bird of a size and velocity fit to be the bearer of the weight of a man?" demanded he who was mounted, with a vivacity that betrayed some jealousy on the subject of a monopoly of learning. "I had thought there was never a book in the valley, out of mine own closet, that dealeth in these abstrusities!"

“Dost think the scriptures are strangers to us? There; thou art now in the public path, and thy journey is without danger. It is matter of marvel to many in this settlement, how thou movest about at midnight, amongst up-turned roots of trees, holes, logs, and stumps, without falling—”

“I have told thee, Ensign, it is by virtue of much training given to the beast. Certain am I, that neither whip nor spur would compel the animal to pass the bounds of discretion. Often have I travelled this bridle-path, without fear, as in truth without danger, when sight was a sense of as little use as that of smelling.”

“I was about to say, falling into thine own hands, which would be a tumble of little less jeopardy than even that of the wicked spirits.”

The medical man affected to laugh at his companion's joke; but, remembering the dignity suited to one of his calling, he immediately resumed the discourse with gravity—

“These may be matters of levity with those who know little of the hardships that are endured in the practice of the settlements. Here have I been on yonder mountain, guided by the instinct of my horse—”

“Ha! hath there been a call at the dwelling of my brother Ring?” demanded the pedestrian, observing, by the direction of the other’s eye, the road he had been travelling.

“Truly there hath; and at the unseasonable hour that is wont, in a very unreasonable proportion of the cases of my practice.”

“And Reuben numbereth another boy to the four that he could count yesterday?”

The medical man held up three of his fingers in a significant manner, as he nodded assent.

“This putteth Faith something in arrears,” returned he who has been called Ensign, and who was no other than the reader’s old acquaintance, Eben Dudley, preferred to that station in the train-band of the valley. “The heart of

my brother Reuben will be gladdened by these tidings, when he shall return from the scout."

"There will be occasion for thankfulness, since he will find seven beneath a roof where he left but four!"

"I will close the bargain with the young captain for the mountain lot this very day!" muttered Dudley, like one suddenly convinced of the prudence of a long debated measure.

"Seven pounds of the colony money is no usurer's price, after all, for a hundred acres of heavily timbered land; and they in full view of a settlement where boys come three at a time!"

The equestrian stopped his horse, and regarding his companion intently and with a significant air, he answered—

"Thou hast now fallen on the clue of an important mystery, Ensign Dudley. This continent was created with a design. The fact is apparent by its riches, its climate, its mag-

nitude, its facilities of navigation, and chiefly in that it hath been left undiscovered, until the advanced condition of society hath given opportunity and encouragement to men of a certain degree of merit, to adventure in its behalf. Consider, neighbour, the wonderful progress it hath already made in the arts, and in learning, in reputation and in resources, and thou wilt agree with me in the conclusion that all this hath been done with a design."

"'Twould be presuming to doubt it; for he hath indeed a short memory to whom it shall be necessary to recall the time when this very valley was little other than a den for beasts of prey, and this beaten highway a deer-track. Dost think that Reuben will be like to raise the whole of the recent gift?"

"With judgment and by the blessing of Providence. The mind is active, Ensign Dudley, when the body is journeying among the forests, and much have my thoughts

been exercised in this matter, whilst thou and others have been in your slumbers. Here have we the colonies in their first century, and yet thou knowest to what a pass of improvement they have arrived. They tell me the Hartford settlement is getting to be apportioned like the towns of mother England,—that there is reason to think the day may come when the provinces shall have a power, and a convenience of culture and communication, equalling that which belongeth to some parts of the venerable island itself !”

“Nay, nay, Doctor Ergot,” returned the other, with an incredulous smile, “that is exceeding the bounds of a discretionable expectation.”

“Thou wilt remember that I said equalling to *certain* parts. I think we may justly imagine, that ere many centuries shall elapse, there may be millions counted in these regions, and

truly that, too, where one seeth naught at present but the savage and the beast."

"I will go with any man, in this question, as far as reason will justify; but doubtless thou hast read in the books uttered by writers over sea, the matters concerning the condition of those countries, wherein it is plain that we may never hope to reach the exalted excellence they enjoy."

"Neighbour Dudley, thou seemest disposed to push an unguarded expression to extremity. I said equalling *certain* parts, meaning always, too, in *certain* things. Now it is known in philosophy, that the stature of man hath degenerated, and must degenerate in these regions, in obedience to established laws of nature; therefore it is meet that allowance should be made for some deficiency in less material qualities."

"It is like, then, that the better sort of the men over sea are ill disposed to quit their country," returned the Ensign, glancing an eye

of some unbelief along the muscular proportions of his own vigorous frame." We have no less than three from the old countries in our village, here, and yet I do not find them men like to have been sought for at the building of Babel."

"This is settling a knotty and learned point by the evidence of a few shallow exceptions. I presume to tell you, Ensign Dudley, that the science, and wisdom, and philosophy of Europe have been exceeding active in this matter; and they have proved, to their own perfect satisfaction, which is the same thing as disposing of the question without appeal, that man and beast, plant and tree, hill and dale, lake and pond, sun, air, fire, and water, are all wanting in some of the perfectness of the older regions. I respect a patriotic sentiment, and can carry the disposition to applaud the bounties received from the hands of a beneficent Creator as far as any man; but that which hath been demonstrated by science, or collected by learning, is

placed too far beyond the objections of lightly minded cavillers, to be doubted by graver faculties."

"I shall not contend against things that are proven," returned Dudley, who was quite as meek in discussion as he was powerful and active in more physical contests; "since it needs be that the learning of men in the old countries must have an exceeding excellence, in virtue of its great age. It would be a visit to remember, should some of its rare advantages be dispersed in these our own youthful regions!"

"And can it be said that our mental wants have been forgotten—that the nakedness of the mind hath been suffered to go without its comely vestment, neighbour Dudley? To me, it seemeth, that therein we have unwonted reason to rejoice, and that the equilibrium of nature is in a manner restored, by the healing exercises of art. It is unseemly in an enlight-

ened province, to insist on qualities that have been discreetly disproven, but learning is a transferable and communicable gift, and it is meet to affirm that it is to be found here, in quantities adapted to the wants of the colony."

"I'll not gainsay it, for having been more of an adventurer in the forest, than one who hath travelled in quest of sights among the settlements along the sea-shore, it may happen that many things are to be seen there, of which my poor abilities have formed no opinion."

"And are we utterly unenlightened, even in this distant valley, Ensign?" returned the leech, leaning over the neck of his horse, and addressing his companion in a mild and persuasive tone, that he had probably acquired in his extensive practice among the females of the settlement. "Are we to be classed with the heathen in knowledge, or to be accounted as the unnurtured men, who are known once to have roamed through these forests, in quest of their game?"

Without assuming any infallibility of judgment, or aspiring to any peculiarity of information, it doth not appear to my defective understanding, Master Dudley, that the progress of the settlement hath ever been checked for want of necessary foresight, nor that the growth of reason among us hath ever been stunted from any lack of mental aliment. Our councils are not barren of wisdom, Ensign, nor hath it often arrived that abstrusities have been propounded, that some one intellect, to say no more in our own favour, hath not been known to grapple with, successfully."

"That there are men, or perhaps I ought to say that there *is a man*, in the valley, who is equal to many marvels in the way of enlightened gifts—"

"I knew we should come to peaceable conclusions, Ensign Dudley," interrupted the other, rising erect in his saddle, with an air of appeased

diginty ; “ for I have ever found you a discreet and consequent reasoner, and one who is never known to resist conviction, when truth is pressed with understanding. That the men from over sea are not often so well gifted as some—we will say, for the sake of a convenient illustration, as thyself, Ensign—is placed beyond the reach of debate, since sight teacheth us that numberless exceptions may be found to all the more general and distinctive laws of nature. I think we are not likely to carry our disagreement further ?”

“ It is impossible to make head against one so ready with his knowledge,” returned the other, well content to exist in his own person a striking exception to the inferiority of his fellows ; “ though it appeareth to me that my brother Ring might be chosen, as another instance of a reasonable stature ; a fact that thou mayst see, Doctor, by regarding him as he approaches through yon meadow. He hath

been, like myself, on the scout, among the mountains."

"There are many instances of physical merit among thy connexions, Master Dudley," returned the complaisant physician. "Though it would seem that thy brother hath not found his companion among them. He is attended by an ill grown, and, it may be added, an ill favoured comrade that I know not."

"Ha! It would seem that Reuben hath fallen on the trail of savages! The man in company is certainly in paint and blanket. It may be well to pause at yonder opening, and await their coming."

As this proposition imposed no particular inconvenience, the Doctor readily assented. The two drew nigh to the place where the men, whom they saw crossing the fields in the distance, were expected to enter the highway.

But little time was lost in attendance. Ere many minutes had elapsed, Reuben Ring,

accoutred and armed like the borderer already introduced in this chapter, arrived at the opening, followed by the stranger, whose appearance had caused so much surprise to those who watched their approach.

“What now, Sergeant!” exclaimed Dudley, when the other was within ear-shot, speaking a little in the manner of one who had legal right to propound his questions; “hast fallen on a trail of the savage, and made a captive; or hath some owl permitted one of its brood to fall from the nest, across thy foot-path?”

“I believe the creature may be accounted a man,” returned the successful Reuben, throwing the breech of his gun to the earth, and leaning on its long barrel while he intently regarded the half-painted, vacant, and extremely equivocal countenance of his captive. “He hath the colours of a Narragansett about the brow and eyes, and yet he faileth greatly in the form and movements.”

“ There are anomalies in the physicals of an Indian, as in those of other men,” interrupted Doctor Ergot, with a meaning glance at Dudley. “ The conclusion of our neighbour Ring may be too hasty, since paint is the fruit of art, and may be applied to any of our faces, after an established usage. But the evidences of nature are far less to be distrusted. It hath come within the province of my studies, to note the differences in formation which occur in the different families of man, and nothing is more readily to be known, to an eye skilled in these abstrusities, than the aboriginal of the tribe Narragansett. Set the man more in a position of examination, neighbours, and it shall shortly be seen to which race he belongs. Thou wilt note in this little facility of investigation, Ensign, a clear evidence of most of the matters that have this morning been agitated between us. Doth the patient speak English ?”

“ Therein have I found some difficulty of

inquiry," returned Reuben, or, as he should now be, and as he was usually called, Sergeant Ring. "He hath been spoken to in the language of a Christian, no less than in that of a heathen; and as yet no reply hath been made, while he obeys commands uttered in both forms of speech."

"It mattereth not," said Ergot, dismounting and drawing near to his subject, with a look towards Dudley, that should seem to court his admiration; "happily the examination before me leaneth but little on any subtleties of speech. Let the man be placed in an attitude of ease; one in which nature may not be fettered by restraint. The conformation of the whole head is remarkably aboriginal, but the distinction of tribes is not to be sought in these general delineations. The forehead, as you see, neighbours, is retreating and narrow, the cheek-bones, as usual, high, and the olfactory

member, as in all of the natives, inclining to Roman."

"Now to me it would seem that the nose of the man hath a marked upturning at the end," Dudley ventured to remark, as the other ran volubly over the general and well known distinctive points of physical construction in an Indian.

"As an exception ! Thou seest, Ensign, by this elevation of the bone, and the protuberance of the more fleshy parts, that the peculiarity is an exception. I should rather have said that the nose originally inclined to the Roman. The departure from regularity has been produced by some casualty of their warfare, such as a blow from a tomahawk, or the gash of a knife—ay ! here thou seest the scar left by the weapon ! It is concealed by the paint, but remove that and you will find it hath all the form of a cicatrice of a corresponding shape. These departures from generalities have a ten-

dency to confound pretenders ; a happy circumstance in itself, for the progress of knowledge on fixed principles. Place the subject more erect, that we may see the natural movement of the muscles. Here is an evidence of great aquatic habits in the dimensions of the foot, which go to confirm original conceptions. It is a happy proof, through which, reasonable and prudent conclusions confirm the quick sighted glances of practice. I pronounce the fellow to be a Narragansett."

"It is then a Narragansett that hath a foot to confound a trail !" returned Eben Dudley, who had been studying the movements and attitudes of the captive with quite as much keenness, and with something more of understanding, than the leech. "Brother Ring, hast ever known an Indian leave such an out-turning foot-print on the leaves ?"

"Ensign, I marvel that a man of thy discretion should dwell on a slight variety of

movement, when a case exists in which the laws of nature may be traced to their sources. This training for the Indian troubles, hath made thee critical in the position of a foot. I have said that the fellow is a Narragansett, and what I have uttered hath not been lightly ventured. Here is the peculiar formation of the foot, which hath been obtained in infancy, a fulness in the muscles of the breast and shoulders, from unusual exercise in an element denser than the air, and a nicer construction in—”

The physician paused, for Dudley had coolly advanced to the captive, and, raising the thin robe of deer skin which was thrown over the whole of his superior members, he exposed the unequivocal skin of a white man. This would have proved an embarrassing refutation to one accustomed to the conflict of wits; but monopoly, in certain branches of knowledge, had produced in favour of Doctor Ergot an

acknowledged superiority, that, in its effects, might be likened to the predominating influence of any other aristocracy, on those faculties that have been benumbed by its operation. His opinions changed, which is more than can be said of his countenance; for, with the readiness of invention which is so often practised in the felicitous institutions we have named, and by which the reasoning instead of regulating is adapted to the practice, he exclaimed, with uplifted hands and eyes that bespoke the fullness of his admiration—

“Here have we another proof of the wonderful agency by which the changes in nature are gradually wrought! Now do we see in this Narragansett—”

“The man is white!” interrupted Dudley, tapping the naked shoulder which he still held exposed to view.

“White, but not a tittle the less a Narragansett. Your captive, beyond a doubt, oweth

his existence to Christian parentage, but accident hath thrown him early among the aboriginals, and all those parts which were liable to change were fast getting to assume the peculiarities of the tribe. He is one of those beautiful and connecting links in the chain of knowledge, by which science followeth up its deductions to demonstration."

"I should ill brook coming to harm for doing violence to a subject of the King," said Reuben Ring, a steady, open-faced yeoman, who thought far less of the subtleties of his companion, than of discharging his social duties in a manner fitting the character of a quiet and well conditioned citizen. "We have had so much of stirring tidings, latterly, concerning the manner the savages conduct their warfare, that it behoveth men in places of trust to be vigilant; for," glancing his eyes towards the ruin of the distant block-house, "thou knowest, brother Dudley, that we have

occasion to be watchful, in a settlement as deep in the forest as this."

"I will answer for the indemnity, Sergeant Ring," said Dudley, with an air of dignity.

"I take upon myself the keeping of this stranger, and will see that he be borne, properly and in fitting season, before the authorities. In the mean time, duty hath caused us to overlook matters of moment, in thy household, which it may be seemly to communicate. Abundance hath not been neglectful of thy interests, during the scout."

"What!" demanded the husband, with rather more of earnestness than was generally exhibited by one of habits as restrained as his own; "hath the woman called upon the neighbours, during my absence?"

Dudley nodded an assent.

"And I shall find another boy beneath my roof?"

Doctor Ergot nodded three times, with a

gravity that might have suited a communication, even more weighty than the one he made.

“Thy woman rarely doth a good turn by halves, Reuben. Thou wilt find that she hath made provision for a successor to our good neighbour Ergot, since a seventh son is born in thy house.”

The broad, honest face of the father flushed with joy, and then a feeling less selfish came over him. He asked, with a slight tremor in the voice, that was none the less touching for coming from the lips of one so stout of frame and firm of movement—

“And the woman—in what manner doth Abundance bear up under the blessing?”

“Bravely,” returned the leech; “go to thy dwelling, Sergeant Ring, and praise God that there is one to look to its concerns in thy absence. He who hath received the gift of seven sons, in five years, need never be a poor

nor a dependant man, in a country like this. Seven farms, added to that pretty homestead of mountain-land which thou now tillest, will render thee a patriarch in thine age, and sustain the name of Ring, hundreds of years hence, when these colonies shall become peopled and powerful, and, I say it boldly, caring not who may call me one that vaunteth out of reason, equal to some of your lofty and self-extolled kingdoms of Europe—ay, even peradventure to the mighty sovereignty of Portugal itself! I have enumerated thy future farms at seven, for the illusion of the Ensign to the virtues of men born with natural propensities to the healing art, must be taken as pleasant speech, since it is a mere delusion of old wives' fancy, and it would be particularly unnecessary here, where every reasonable situation of this nature is already occupied. Go to thy wife, Sergeant, and bid her be of good cheer; for she hath done herself, thee,

and thy country a service, and that without dabbling in pursuits foreign to her comprehension."

The sturdy yeoman, on whom this rich gift of Providence had been dispensed, raised his hat, and placing it decently before his face, he offered up a silent thanksgiving for the favour. Then transferring his captive to the keeping of his superior and kinsman, he was soon seen striding over the fields, towards his upland dwelling, with a heavy foot, though with a light heart.

In the mean time, Dudley and his companion bestowed a more particular attention on the silent and nearly motionless object of their curiosity. Though the captive appeared to be of middle age, his eye was unmeaning, his air timid and uncertain, and his form cringing and ungainly. In all these particulars he was seen to differ from the known peculiarities of a native warrior.

Previously to departing, Reuben Ring had explained that while traversing the woods, on that duty of watchfulness to which the state of the colony, and some recent signs had given rise, this wandering person had been encountered and secured, as seemed necessary to the safety of the settlement. He had neither sought, nor avoided his captor; but when questioned concerning his tribe, his motive for traversing those hills, and his future intentions, no satisfactory reply could be extracted. He had scarcely spoken, and the little that he said was uttered in a jargon, between the language of his interrogator and the dialect of some barbarous nation. Though there was much in the actual state of the colonies, and in the circumstances in which this wanderer had been found, to justify his detention, little had in truth been discovered, to supply a clue either to any material facts in his history, or to any of his views in being in the immediate vicinity of the valley.

Guided only by this barren information, Dudley and his companion endeavoured, as they moved towards the hamlet, to entrap their prisoner into some confession of his object, by putting their questions with a sagacity not unusual to men in remote and difficult situations, where necessity and danger are apt to keep alive all the native energies of the human mind. The answers were little connected and unintelligible, sometimes seeming to exhibit the finest subtlety of savage cunning, and at others, to possess the mental helplessness of appearing the most abject fatuity.

CHAPTER IX.

" I am not prone to weeping, as our sex
Commonly are :—

But I have
That honourable grief lodged here, which burns
Worse than tears down."

Winter's Tale.

IF the pen of a compiler, like that we wield, possessed the mechanical power of the stage, it would be easy to shift the scenes of this legend, as rapidly and effectively as is required for its right understanding, and for the proper maintenance of its interest. That which cannot be

done with the magical aid of machinery, must be attempted by less ambitious, and, we fear, by far less efficacious means.

At the same early hour of the day, and at no great distance from the spot where Dudley announced his good fortune to his brother Ring, another morning meeting had place, between persons of the same blood and connexions. From the instant when the pale light that precedes the day was first seen in the heavens, the windows and doors of the considerable dwelling on the opposite side of the valley had been unbarred. Ere the glow of the sun had gilded the sky over the outline of the eastern woods, this example of industry and providence was followed by the inmates of every house in the village, or on the surrounding hills; and by the time the golden globe itself was visible above the trees, there was not a human being in all that settlement, of proper age and health, who was not actively afoot.

It is unnecessary to say that the dwelling particularly named was the present habitation of the household of Mark Heathcote. Though age had sapped the foundations of his strength, and had nearly dried the channels of his existence, the venerable religionist still lived. While his physical perfection had been gradually giving way before the ordinary decay of nature, the moral man was but little altered. It is even probable that his visions of futurity were less dimmed by the mists of carnal interests, than when last seen, and that the spirit had gained some portion of that energy which had certainly been abstracted from the more corporeal parts of his existence. At the hour already named, the Puritan was seated in the piazza, which stretched along the whole front of a dwelling, that, however it might be deficient in architectural proportions, was not wanting in the more substantial comforts of a spacious and commodious frontier residence. In order to obtain a

faithful portrait of a man so intimately connected with our tale, the reader will fancy him one who had numbered four-score and ten years, with a visage on which deep and constant mental striving had wrought many and meaning furrows, a form that trembled while it yet exhibited the ruins of powerful limb and flexible muscle, and a countenance in which ascetic reflections had engraved a severity, that was but faintly relieved by the gleamings of a natural kindness, which no acquired habits, nor any traces of metaphysical thought, could ever entirely erase. Across this picture of venerable and self-mortifying age, the first rays of the sun were now softly cast, lighting a dimmed eye and furrowed face with a look of brightness and peace. Perhaps the blandness of the expression belonged as much to the season and hour, as to the habitual character of the man. This benignancy of feature, unusual rather in its strength than in its existence, might have been height-

ened by the fact that his spirit had just wrought in prayer, as was usual, in the circle of his children and dependants, ere they left those retired parts of the building, where they had found rest and security during the night. Of the former, none known and cherished in the domestic circle had been absent; and the ample provision that was making for the morning meal sufficiently showed that the number of the latter had in no degree diminished since the reader was familiar with the domestic economy of his household.

Time had produced no very striking alteration in the appearance of Content. It is true that the brown hue of his features had deepened, and that his frame was beginning to lose some of its elasticity and ease of action, in the more measured movements of middle age. But the governed temperament of the individual had always kept the animal in more than usual subjection. Even his earlier days had rather exhibited the promise than the performance of the

ordinary youthful qualities. Mental gravity had long before produced a corresponding physical effect. In reference to his exterior, and using the language of the painter, it would now be said, that, without having wrought any change in form and proportions, the colours had been mellowed by time. If a few hairs of grey were sprinkled, here and there, around his brow, it was as moss gathers on the stones of the edifice, rather furnishing evidence of its increased adhesion, and approved stability, than denoting any symptoms of decay.

Not so with his gentle and devoted partner. That softness and sweetness of air, which had first touched the heart of Content, was still to be seen, though it existed amid the traces of a constant and a corroding grief. The freshness of youth had departed, and in its place was visible the more lasting, and, in her case, the more affecting beauty of expression. The eye of Ruth had lost none of its gentle-

ness, and her smile still continued kind and attractive: but the former was often painfully vacant, seeming to look inward upon those secret and withering sources of sorrow that were deeply and almost mysteriously seated in her heart; while the latter resembled the cold brightness of that planet, which illumines objects by repelling the borrowed lustre from its own bosom. The matronly form, the feminine beaming of the countenance, and the melodious voice, yet remained: but the first had been shaken till it stood on the very verge of a premature decay: the second had a mingling of anxious care in its most sympathetic movements; and the last was seldom without that fearful thrill which so deeply affects the senses, by conveying to the understanding a meaning so foreign from the words. And yet an uninterested and ordinary observer might not have seen, in the faded comeliness and blighted maturity of the matron, more than

the every day signs that betray the turn in the tide of human existence. As befitted such a subject, the colouring of sorrow had been traced by a hand too delicate to leave the lines visible to every vulgar eye. Like the master touches of art, her grief, as it was beyond the sympathies, so it lay beyond the ken of those, whom excellence may fail to excite, or in whom absence can deaden affections. Still her feelings were true to all who had any claims on her love. The predominance of wasting grief over the more genial springs of her enjoyments, only went to prove how much greater is the influence of the generous than the selfish qualities of our nature, in a heart that is truly endowed with tenderness. It is scarce necessary to say that this gentle and constant woman sorrowed for her child.

Had Ruth Heathcote known that the girl ceased to live, it would not have been difficult for one of her faith to have deposited her

regrets, by the side of hopes that were so justifiable, in the grave of the innocent. But the living death, to which her offspring might be condemned, was rarely absent from her thoughts. She listened to the maxims of resignation, which were heard flowing from lips she loved, with the fondness of a woman and the meekness of a christian ; and then, even while the holy lessons were still sounding in her attentive organs, the workings of an unconquerable nature led her insidiously back to the sorrow of a mother.

The imagination of this devoted and feminine being had never possessed an undue control over her reason. Her visions of happiness, with the man whom her judgment, not less than her inclination, approved, had been such as experience and religion might justify. But she was now fated to learn there is a fearful poetry in sorrow, which can sketch with a grace and an imaginative power, that no feebler efforts

of a heated fancy may ever equal. She heard the sweet breathing of her slumbering infant in the whispering of the summer airs; its plaints came to her ears amid the howlings of the gale; while the eager question and fond reply were mixed up with the most ordinary intercourse of her own household. To her the laugh of childish happiness, that often came on the still air of evening from the hamlet, sounded like the voice of mourning, and scarce an infantile sport met her eye that did not bring with it a pang of anguish. Twice, since the events of the inroad, had she been a mother, and, as if an eternal blight were doomed to destroy her hopes, the little creatures to whom she had given birth slept side by side near the base of the ruined block. Thither she often went, but it was rather to be the victim of those cruel images of her fancy than as a mourner. Her visions of the dead were calm and even consolatory; but if ever her thoughts mounted to the abodes of

eternal peace, and her feeble fancy essayed to embody the forms of the blessed, her mental eye sought her who was not, rather than those who were believed to be secure in their felicity. Wasting and delusory as were these glimpses of the mind, there were others far more harrowing because they presented themselves with more of the coarse and certain features of the world. It was the common, and perhaps it was the better opinion of the inhabitants of the valley, that death had early sealed the fate of those who had fallen into the hands of the savages on the occasion of the inroad. Such a result was in conformity with the known practices and ruthless passions of the conquerors, who seldom spared life, unless to render revenge more cruelly refined, or to bring consolation to some bereaved mother of the tribe, by offering a substitute for the dead in the person of a captive. There was relief, to picture the face of the laughing cherub in the

clouds ; or to listen to its light footstep in the empty halls of the dwelling, for, in these illusive images of the brain, suffering was confined to her own bosom. But when stern reality usurped the place of fancy, and she saw her living daughter, shivering in the wintry blasts, or sinking beneath the fierce heats of the climate, cheerless in the desolation of female servitude, and suffering meekly the lot of physical weakness beneath a savage master, she endured that anguish which was gradually exhausting the springs of life.

Though the father was not altogether exempt from similar sorrow, it beset him less ceaselessly. He knew how to struggle with the workings of his mind as best became a man. Though strongly impressed with the belief that the captives had early been put beyond the reach of suffering, he had neglected no duty which tenderness to his sorrowing partner, parental love, or christian duty, could require at his hands.

The Indians had retired on the crust of the snow ; and with the thaw every foot-print or sign by which such wary foes might be traced had vanished. It remained matter of doubt to what tribe, or even to what nation, the marauders belonged. The peace of the colony had not yet been openly broken ; and the inroad had been rather a violent and fierce symptom of the evils that were contemplated, than the actual commencement of the ruthless hostilities which had since ravaged the frontier. But while policy had kept the colonists quiet, private affection omitted no rational means of effecting the restoration of the sufferers, in the event of their having been spared.

Scouts had passed among the conspiring and but half peaceable tribes nearest to the settlement ; and rewards and menaces had both been liberally used, in order to ascertain the character of the savages who had laid waste the valley, as well as the more interesting fortunes of their

hapless victims. Every expedient to detect the truth had failed. The Narragansetts affirmed that their constant enemies the Mohicans, acting with their customary treachery, had plundered their English friends; while the Mohicans vehemently threw back the imputation on the Narragansetts. At other times, some Indians affected to make dark allusions to the hostile feelings of fierce warriors, who, under the name of the Five Nations, were known to reside within the limits of the Dutch colony of New Netherlands, and to dwell upon the jealousy of the Pale Faces, who spoke a language different from that of the Yengeese. In short, inquiry had produced no result; and Content, when he did permit his fancy to represent his daughter as still living, was forced to admit to himself the probability that she might be buried far in the ocean of wilderness, which then covered most of the surface of this continent.

Once, indeed, a rumour of an exciting nature

had reached the family. An itinerant trader, bound from the wilds of the interior to a mart on the sea-shore, had entered the valley. He brought with him a report that a child, answering in some respects to the appearance which might now be supposed to belong to her who was lost, was living among the savages, on the banks of the smaller lakes of the adjoining colony. The distance to this spot was great; the path led through a thousand dangers, and the result far from certain. Yet it quickened hopes which had long been dormant. Ruth never urged any request that might involve serious hazard on her husband; and for many months the latter had even ceased to speak on the subject. Still nature was working powerfully within him. His eyes, at all times reflecting and calm, grew more thoughtful—deeper lines of care gathered about his brow,—and at length melancholy took possession of a countenance which was usually so placid.

It was at this precise period that Eben Dudley chose to urge the suit he had always pressed after his own desultory fashion, on the decision of Faith. One of those well ordered accidents which, from time to time, had brought the girl and the young borderer in private conversation, enabled him to effect his design with sufficient clearness. Faith heard him without betraying any of her ordinary waywardness, and answered with as little prevarication as the subject seemed to demand.

“ This is well, Eben Dudley,” she said, “ and it is no more than an honest girl hath a right to hear, from one who hath taken as many means as thou to get into her favour. But he who would have his life tormented by me hath a solemn duty to do ere I listen to his wishes.”

“ I have been in the lower towns, and studied their manner of life, and I have been upon the scouts of the colony, to keep the Indians in their wigwams,” returned her suitor, endeavour-

ing to recount the feats of manliness that might reasonably be expected of one inclined to venture on so hazardous an experiment as matrimony. "The bargain with the young Captain for the hill-lot, and for a village homestead, is drawing near a close; and as the neighbours will not be backward at the stone-bee, or the raising, I see nothing to—"

"Thou deceivest thyself, observant Dudley," interrupted the girl, "if thou believest eye of thine can see that which is to be sought, ere one and the same fortune shall be the property of thee and me. Hast noted, Eben, the manner in which the cheek of the Madam hath paled, and how her eye is getting sunken, since the time when the fur trader tarried with us, the week of the storm?"

"I cannot say that there is much change in the wearing of the Madam, within the bearing of my memory," answered Dudley, who was never remarkable for minute observations of this

nature, however keen he might prove in subjects more intimately connected with his daily pursuits. "She is not young and blooming as thou, Faith; nor is it often that we see—"

"I tell thee, man, that sorrow preyeth upon her form, and that she liveth but in the memory of the lost infant!"

"This is carrying mourning beyond the bounds of reason. The child is at peace; as is thy brother, Whittal, beyond all manner of question. That we have not discovered their bones is owing to the fire, which left but little to tell of—"

"Thy head is a charnel house, dull Dudley, but this picture of its furniture shall not suffice for me. The man who is to be my husband must have a feeling for a mother's sorrows!"

"What is now getting uppermost in thy mind, Faith? Is it for me to bring back the dead to life, or to place a child that hath been

lost so many years, once more in the arms of its parents?

“ It is.—Nay, open not thine eyes, as if light were first breaking into the darkness of a clouded brain ! I repeat, it is !”

“ I am glad that we have got to these open declarations, for too much of my life hath been already wasted in unsettled gallanting, when sound wisdom, and the example of all around me, have shown that in order to become the father of a family, and to be esteemed for a substantial settler, I should have both cleared and wived some years ago. I wish to deal justly by all, and having given thee reason to think that the day might come when we should live together, as is fitting to people of our condition, I felt it a duty to ask thee to share my chances ; but now that thou dealest in impossibilities, it is needful to seek elsewhere.”

“ This hath ever been thy way, when a good

understanding hath been established between us. Thy mind is ever getting into some discontent, and then blame is heaped on one who rarely doth any thing that should in reason offend thee. What madness maketh thee dream that I ask impossibilities ! Surely, Dudley, thou canst not have noted the manner in which the nature of the Madam is giving way before the consuming heat of her grief ; thou canst not look into the sorrow of woman, or thou wouldst have listened with more kindness to a plan of travelling the woods for a short season, in order that it might be known, whether she of whom the trader spoke is the lost one of our family, or the child of some stranger !”

Though Faith spoke with vexation, she also spoke with feeling. Her dark eye swam in tears, and the colour of her brown cheek deepened, until her companion saw new reasons to forget his discontent in sympathies, which,

however obtuse they might be, were never entirely dormant.

“ If a journey of a few hundred miles be all thou askest, girl, why speak in parables ?” he good-naturedly replied. “ The kind word was not wanting to put me on such a trail. We will be married on the Sabbath, and, please Heaven, the Wednesday, or the Saturday at most, shall see me on the path of the western trader.”

“ No delay. Thou must depart with the sun. The more active thou provest on the journey, the sooner wilt thou have the power to make me repent a foolish deed.”

But Faith had been persuaded to relax a little from this severity. They were married on the Sabbath, and the following day Content and Dudley left the valley, in quest of the distant tribe, on which the scion of another stock was said to have been so violently engrafted.

It is needless to dwell on the dangers and

privations of such an expedition. The Hudson, the Delaware, and the Susquehannah rivers that were then better known in tales than to the inhabitants of New England, were all crossed ; and after a painful and hazardous journey, the adventurers reached the first of that collection of small interior lakes, whose banks are now so beautifully decorated with villages and farms. Here, in the bosom of savage tribes, and exposed to every danger of field and flood, supported only by his hopes, and by the presence of a stout companion that hardships or danger could not easily subdue, the father diligently sought his child.

At length a people were found, who held a captive that answered the description of the trader. We shall not dwell on the feelings with which Content approached the village that contained this little descendant of a white race. He had not concealed his errand, and the sacred character in which he came found pity and

respect even among those barbarous tenants of the wilderness. A deputation of the chiefs received him in the skirts of their clearing. He was conducted to a wigwam, where a council-fire was lighted, and an interpreter opened the subject, by placing the amount of the ransom offered, and the professions of peace with which the strangers came, in the fairest light before his auditors. It is not usual for the American savage to loosen his hold easily, on one naturalized in his tribe. But the meek air and noble confidence of Content touched the latent qualities of those generous though fierce children of the woods. The girl was sent for, that she might stand in the presence of the elders of the nation.

No language can paint the sensation with which Content first looked upon this adopted daughter of the savages. The years and sex were in accordance with his wishes, but, in place of the golden hair and azure eyes of the cherub

he had lost, there appeared a girl in whose jet black tresses and equally dark organs of sight, he might better trace a descendant of the French of the Canadas, than one sprung from his own Saxon lineage. The father was not quick of mind, in the ordinary occupations of life, but nature was now big within him. There needed no second glance to say how cruelly his hopes had been deceived. A smothered groan struggled from his chest, and then his self-command returned with the imposing grandeur of Christian resignation. He arose, and thanking the chiefs for their indulgence, he made no secret of the mistake, by which he had been led so far on a fruitless errand. While speaking, the signs and gestures of Dudley gave him reason to believe that his companion had something of importance to communicate. In a private interview, the latter suggested the expediency of concealing the truth, and of rescuing the child they had in fact discovered, from the hands of

her barbarous masters. It was now too late to practise a deception that might have availed for this object, had the stern principles of Content permitted the artifice. But transferring some portion of the interest which he felt for the fortunes of his own offspring, to that of the unknown parent, who, like himself, most probably mourned the uncertain fate of the girl before him, he tendered the ransom intended for Ruth in behalf of the captive. It was rejected. Disappointed in both their objects, the adventurers were obliged to quit the village, with weary feet and still heavier hearts.

If any who read these pages have ever felt the agony of suspense, in a matter involving the best of human affections, they will know how to appreciate the sufferings of the mother, during the month that her husband was absent on this holy errand. At times hope brightened around her heart, until the glow of pleasure was again mantling on her cheek, and playing

in her eye. The first week of the adventure was one almost of happiness. The hazards of the journey were nearly forgotten in its anticipated results ; and, though occasional apprehensions quickened the pulses of one whose system answered so fearfully to the movements of the spirit, there was a predominance of hope in all her anticipations. She again passed among her maidens, with a mien in which joy was struggling with the meekness of subdued habits, and her smiles once more began to beam with renovated happiness. To his dying day, old Mark Heathcote never forgot the sudden sensation that was created by the soft laugh, that on some unexpected occasion came to his ear from the lips of his son's wife. Though years had elapsed between the moment when that unwonted sound was heard, and the time at which the action of the tale now stands, he had never heard it repeated. To heighten the feelings which were now uppermost in the mind of

Ruth, when within a day's march of the village to which he was going Content had found means to send the tidings of his prospects of success. It was over all these renewed wishes that disappointment was to throw its chill, and it was affections thus revived that were to be again blighted by the cruellest of all withering influences, that of hope defeated.

It was near the hour of the setting of the sun when Content and Dudley reached the deserted clearing, on their return to the valley. Their path led through this opening on the mountain side, and there was one point, among the bushes, from which the buildings that had already arisen from the ashes of the burning might be distinctly seen. Until now the husband and father had believed himself equal to any effort that duty might require, in the progress of this mournful service. But here he paused, and communicated a wish to his companion that he would go ahead and break the

nature of the deception that had led them so far on a fruitless mission. Perhaps Content was himself ignorant of all he wished, or to what unskilful hands he had confided a commission of more than ordinary delicacy. He merely felt his own inability, and, with a weakness that may find some apology in his feelings, he saw his companion depart, without instructions, or indeed without any other guide than Nature.

Though Faith had betrayed no marked uneasiness during the absence of the travellers, her quick eye was the first to discover the form of her husband, as he came with a tired step across the fields, in the direction of the dwellings. Long ere Dudley reached the house, every one of its inmates had assembled in the piazza. This was no meeting of turbulent delight, or of clamorous greetings. The adventurer drew near amid a silence so oppressive, that it utterly disconcerted a studied project, by which he had hoped to announce his tidings in

a manner suited to the occasion. His hand was on the gate of the little court, and still none spoke; his foot was on the low step, and yet no voice bade him welcome. The looks of the little group were rather fixed on the features of Ruth, than on the person of him who approached. Her face was pallid as death, her eye contracted, but filled with the mental effort that sustained her, and her lip scarce trembled, as, in obedience to a feeling still stronger than the one which had so long oppressed her, she exclaimed,

“Eben Dudley, where hast thou left my husband?”

“The young Captain was a-foot weary, and he tarried in the second growth on the hill; but so brave a walker cannot be far behind. We shall see him soon, at the opening by the dead beech; and it is there that I recommend the Madam—”

“It was thoughtful in Heathcote, and like

his usual kindness, to devise this well meant caution!" said Ruth, across whose countenance a smile so radiant passed, that it imparted the expression which is believed to characterize the peculiar benignancy of angels. "Still it was unnecessary; for he should have known that we place our strength on the Rock of Ages. Tell me, in what manner hath my precious one borne the exceeding weariness of thy tangled route?"

The wandering glance of the messenger had gone from face to face, until it became fastened on the countenance of his own wife, in a settled, unmeaning gaze.

"Nay, Faith hath demeaned well, both as my assistant and as thy partner, and thou mayest see that her comeliness is in no degree changed. And did the babe falter in this weary passage, or did she retard thy movements by her fretfulness? But I know thy nature, man; she hath been borne over many long

miles of mountain-side and treacherous swamp, in thine own vigorous arms. Thou answerest not, Dudley!" exclaimed Ruth, taking the alarm, and laying a hand firmly on the shoulder of him she questioned, as, forcing his half-averted face to meet her eye, she seemed to read his soul.

The muscles of the sun-burnt and strong features of the borderer worked involuntarily; his broad chest swelled to its utmost expansion; big burning drops rolled out upon his brown cheeks; and then, taking the arm of Ruth in one of his own powerful hands, he compelled her to release her hold, with a firm but respectful exercise of his strength, and thrusting the form of his own wife, without ceremony, aside, he passed through the circle, and entered the dwelling with the tread of a giant.

The head of Ruth dropped upon her bosom; the paleness again came over her cheeks; and it was then that the inward look of the eye

might first be seen, which afterwards became so constant and so painful an expression in her countenance. From that hour, to the time in which the family of the Wish-Ton-Wish is again brought immediately before the reader, no further rumours were ever heard to lessen or to increase the wasting regrets of her bosom.

CHAPTER X,

“ Sir, he hath never fed of the dainties that are bred in a book ; he hath not eaten paper, a it were ;—he hath not drunk ink ; his intellect is not replenished ; he is only an animal, only sensible in the duller parts.”

Love's Labour's Lost.

“ Here cometh Faith, to bring us tidings of the hamlet,” said the husband of the woman whose character we have so feebly sketched, as he took his seat in the piazza, at the early hour, and in the group already mentioned, “ The Ensign hath been abroad in

the hills, throughout the night, with a chosen party of our people, and perchance she hath been sent with the substance of that they have gathered concerning the unknown trail."

"The heavy-footed Dudley hath scarce mounted to the dividing ridge, where, report goeth, the prints of moccasins were seen," observed a young man, who in his person bore all the evidences of an active and healthful manhood. "Of what service is the scouting that faileth of the necessary distance by the weariness of its leader?"

"If thou believest, boy, that thy young foot is equal to contend with the sinews of Eben Dudley, there may be occasion to show the magnitude of thy error, ere the danger of this Indian outbreaking shall pass away. Thou art too stubborn of will, Mark, to be yet trusted with the leading of parties that may hold the safety of all who dwell in the Wish-Ton-Wish within their keeping."

The young man looked displeased ; but, fearful that his father might observe and misinterpret his humour into a personal disrespect, he turned away, permitting his frowning eye to rest, for an instant, on the timid and stolen glance of a maiden, whose cheek was glowing like the eastern sky, as she busied herself with the preparations of the table.

“ What welcome news dost bring from the sign of the Whip-Poor-Will ? ” Content asked of the woman, who had now come within the little gate of his court. “ Hast seen the Ensign, since the party took the hill paths ?—or is it some traveller who hath charged thee with matter for our ears ? ”

“ Eye of mine hath not seen the man since he girded himself with the sword of office,” returned Faith, entering the piazza, and nodding salutation to those around her ; “ and as for strangers, when the clock shall strike noon, it will be one month to the day that the last of

them was housed within my doors. But I complain not of the want of custom, as the Ensign would never quit the bar and his gossip to go into the mountain-lots, so long as there was one to fill his ears with the marvels of the old countries, or even to discourse of the home-stirrings of the colonies themselves."

"Thou speakest lightly, Faith, of one who merits thy respect and thy duty."

The eye of the former studied the meek countenance of her from whom this reproof came, with an intenseness and a melancholy that showed her thoughts were on other matters, and then, as if suddenly recalled to what had passed, she resumed—

"Truly, what with duty to the man as a husband, and respect to him as an officer of the colony, Madam Heathcote, the task is not one of easy bearing. If the King's representative had given the colours to my brother Reuben, and left the Dudley with the halberd

in his hand, the preferment would have been ample for one of his qualities, and all the better for the credit of the settlement."

"The Governor distributed his favour according to the advice of men competent to distinguish merit," said Content. "Eben was foremost in the bloody affair among the people of the Plantations, where his manhood was of good example to all in company. Should he continue as faithful and as valiant, thou mayst yet live to see thyself the consort of a captain!"

"Not for glory gained in this night's marching, for yonder cometh the man, with a sound body, and seemingly with the stomach of a Caesar—ay, and I'll answer for it, of a regiment too! It is no trifle that will satisfy his appetite after one of these—ha! pray heaven the fellow be not harmed; truly, he hath our neighbour Ergot in attendance."

"There is other than he too, for one cometh in the rear whose gait and air is unknown to

me—the trail hath been struck, and Dudley leadeth a captive ! A savage, in his paint and cloak of skin, is taken.”

This assertion caused all to rise, for the excitement of an apprehended inroad was still strong in the minds of those secluded people. Not a syllable more was uttered, until the scout and his companion were before them.

The quick glance of Faith had scanned the person of her husband, and, resuming her spirits with the certainty that he was unharmed, she was the first to greet him with words.

“ How now, Ensign Dudley ?” said the woman, quite vexed that she had unguardedly betrayed a greater interest in his welfare than she might always deem prudent—“ how now, Ensign, hath the campaign ended with no better trophy than this ?”

“ The fellow is not a chief, nor, by his step and dull look, even a warrior ; but he was, nevertheless, a lurker nigh the settlements, and it

was thought prudent to bring him in," returned the husband, addressing himself to Content, while he answered the salutation of his wife with a sufficiently brief nod. "My own scouting hath brought nothing to light, but my brother Ring hath fallen on the trail of him that is here present, and it is not a little that we are puzzled in probing, as the good Doctor Ergot calleth it, into the meaning of his errand."

"Of what tribe may the savage be?"

"There hath been discussion among us on that matter," returned Dudley, with an oblique glance of the eye towards the physician. "Some have said he is a Narragansett, while others think he cometh of a stock still further east."

"In giving that opinion, I spoke merely of his secondary or acquired habits," interrupted Ergot; "for, having reference to his original, the man is assuredly a white."

"A white!" repeated all around him.

"Beyond a cavil, as may be seen by divers

particulars in his outward conformation, viz. in the shape of the head, the muscles of the arms and of the legs, the air and gait, besides sundry other signs, that are familiar to men who have made the physical peculiarities of the two races their study."

"One of which is this!" continued Dudley, throwing up the robe of the captive, and giving his companions the ocular evidence which had so satisfactorily removed all his own doubts. "Though the colour of the skin may not be proof positive, like that named by our neighbour Ergot, it is still something in helping a man of little learning to make up an opinion in such a matter."

"Madam!" exclaimed Faith, so suddenly as to cause her she addressed to start, "for the sake of Heaven's mercy, let the maidens bring soap and water, that the face of this man be cleansed of its paint."

"What foolishness is thy brain set upon?"

rejoined the Ensign, who had latterly affected some of that superior gravity which might be supposed to belong to his official station. "We are not now under the roof of the Whip-Poor-Will, wife of mine, but in the presence of those who need none of thy suggestions to give proper forms to an examination of office."

Faith heeded no reproof. Instead of waiting for others to perform that which she had desired, she applied herself to the task, with a dexterity that had been acquired by long practice, and a zeal that seemed awakened by some extraordinary emotion. In a minute, the colours had disappeared from the features of the captive; and though deeply tanned by exposure to an American sun and to sultry winds, his face was unequivocally that of one who owed his origin to an European ancestry. The movements of the eager woman were watched with curious interest by all present, and when

the short task was ended, a murmur of surprise broke simultaneously from every lip.

“There is meaning in this masquerade,” observed Content, who had long and intently studied the dull and ungainly countenance that was exposed to his scrutiny by the operation.

“I have heard of Christian men who have sold themselves to gain, and who, forgetting religion and the love of their race, have been known to league with the savage, in order to pursue rapine in the settlements. This wretch hath the subtlety of one of the French of the Canadas in his eye.”

“Away ! away !” cried Faith, forcing herself in front of the speaker, and by placing her two hands on the shaven crown of the prisoner, forming a sort of shade to his features—“away with all folly about the Frenchers and wicked leagues ! This is no plotting miscreant, but a stricken innocent ! Whittal, my brother Whittal, dost know me ?”

The tears rolled down the cheeks of the wayward woman, as she gazed into the face of her witless relative, whose eye lighted with one of its occasional gleamings of intelligence, and who indulged in a low, vacant laugh, ere he answered her earnest interrogatory.

“Some speak like men from over sea,” he said, “and some speak like men of the woods. Is there such a thing as bear’s meat, or a mouthful of hominy, in the wigwam?”

Had the voice of one long known to be in the grave broken on the ears of the family, it would scarcely have produced a deeper sensation, or have quickened the blood more violently about their hearts, than this sudden and utterly unexpected discovery of the character of their captive. Wonder and awe held them mute for a time, and then Ruth was seen standing before the restored wanderer, her hands clasped in the attitude of petition, her eye contracted and imploring, and her

whole person expressive of the suspense and excitement which had roused her long latent emotions to agony.

“Tell me,” said a thrilling voice, that might have quickened the intellect of one even duller than the man addressed, “as thou hast pity in thy heart, tell me, if my babe yet live?”

“’Tis a good babe,” returned the other; and then laughing again, in his own vacant and unmeaning manner, he bent his eyes with a species of stupid wonder on Faith, in whose appearance there was far less change than in the speaking but wasted countenance of her who stood immediately before him.

“Give leave, dearest Madam,” interposed the sister; “I know the nature of the boy, and could ever do more with him than any other.”

But this request was useless. The system of the mother, in its present state of excitement, was unequal to further effort. Sinking into the watchful arms of Content, she was borne away,

and for a minute the anxious interest of the handmaidens left none but the men on the piazza.

“Whittal, my old playfellow, Whittal Ring!” said the son of Content, advancing with a humid eye to take the hand of the prisoner; “hast forgotten, man, the companion of thy early days? It is young Mark Heathcote that speaks.”

The other looked up into his countenance, for a moment, with a reviving recollection; but shaking his head, he drew back in marked displeasure, muttering, loud enough to be heard—

“What a false liar is a pale-face! Here is one of the tall rogues wishing to pass for a loping boy!”

What more he uttered his auditors never knew, for he instantly changed his language to some dialect of an Indian tribe.

“The mind of the unhappy youth hath even been more blunted by exposure and the

usages of a savage life, than by Nature," said Content, who, with most of the others, had been recalled by his interest in the examination to the scene they had momentarily quitted. "Let the sister deal tenderly with the lad, and in Heaven's time shall we learn the truth."

The deep feeling of the father clothed his words with authority. The eager group gave place, and something like the solemnity of an official examination succeeded to the irregular and hurried interrogatories which had first broken on the dull intellect of the recovered wanderer.

The dependants took their stations, in a circle, around the chair of the Puritan, by whose side was placed Content, while Faith induced her brother to be seated on the step of the piazza, in a manner that all might hear. The attention of the brother himself was drawn from the formality of the arrangement, by placing food in his hands.

“ And now, Whittal, I would know,” commenced the ready woman, when a deep silence denoted the attention of the auditors, “ I would know, if thou rememberest the day I clad thee in garments of boughten cloth, from over sea, and how fond thou wast of being seen among the kine in colours so gay.”

The young man looked up in her face, as if the tones of her voice gave him pleasure, but instead of making any reply, he preferred to munch the bread, with which she had endeavoured to lure him back to their ancient confidence.

“ Surely, boy, thou canst not so soon have forgotten the gift I bought with the hard earnings of a wheel that turned at night. The tail of yon peacock is not finer than thou then wast—But I will make thee such another garment, that thou mayst go with the trainers to their weekly muster.”

The youth dropped the robe of skin that

covered the upper part of his body, and making a forward gesture, with the gravity of an Indian, he answered—

“ Whittal is a warrior on his path ; he has no time for the talk of the women ! ”

“ Now, brother, thou forgettest the manner in which I was wont to feed thy hunger, as the frost pinched thee, in the cold mornings, and at the hour, when the kine needed thy care, else thou wouldst not call me woman.”

“ Hast ever been on the trail of a Pequot ? Knowest how to whoop among the men ? ”

“ What is an Indian whoop to the bleating of thy flocks, or the bellowing of cattle in the bushes ! Thou rememberest the sound of the bells, as they tingled among the second growth of an evening ? ”

The ancient herdsman turned his head, and seemed to lend his attention, as a dog listens to an approaching footstep. But the gleam of recollection was quickly lost. In the next mo-

ment, he yielded to the more positive, and, possibly, more urgent demands of his appetite.

“ ‘Then hast thou lost the use of ears; else thou wouldst not say that thou forgettest the sound of the bells.’ ”

“ ‘Didst ever hear a wolf howl?’ ” exclaimed the other. “ ‘That’s a sound for a hunter! I saw the Great Chief strike the striped panther, when the boldest warrior of the tribe grew white as a craving pale-face at his leaps!’ ”

“ ‘Talk not to me of your ravenous beasts and great chiefs, but rather let us think of the days when we were young, and when thou hadst delight in the sports of a christian childhood. Hast forgotten, Whittal, how our mother used to give us leave to pass the idle time, in games among the snow?’ ”

“ ‘Nipset hath a mother in her wigwam, but he asketh no leave to go on the hunt. He is a man; the next snow he will be a warrior.’ ”

“ ‘Silly boy! This is some treachery of the

savage, by which he has bound thy weakness with the fetters of his craftiness. Thy mother, Whittal, was a woman of christian belief, and one of a white race ; and a kind and mourning mother was she over thy feeble-mindedness ! Dost not remember, unthankful of heart, how she nursed thy sickly hours in boyhood, and how she administered to all thy bodily wants ? Who was it that fed thee when a-hungered, or who had compassion on thy waywardness, when others tired of thy idle deeds, or grew impatient of thy weakness ?”

The brother looked for an instant at the flushed features of the speaker, as if glimmerings of some faintly distinguished scenes crossed the visions of his mind ; but the animal still predominated, and he continued to feed his hunger.

“ This exceedeth human endurance !” exclaimed the excited Faith. “ Look into this eye, weak one, and say if thou knowest her who

supplied the place of that mother whom thou refusest to remember ; she who hath toiled for thy comfort, and who hath never refused to listen to all thy complaints, and to soften all thy sufferings ? Look at this eye, and speak ; dost know me ?”

“ Certain !” returned the other, laughing with a half intelligent expression of recognition ; “ ’tis a woman of the pale-faces, and, I warrant me, one that will never be satisfied till she hath all the furs of the Americas on her back, and all the venison of the woods in her kitchen. Didst ever hear the tradition, how that wicked race got into the hunting grounds, and robbed the warriors of the country ?”

The disappointment of Faith had made her too impatient to lend a pleased attention to this tale ; but at that moment a form appeared at her side, and, by a quiet and commanding gesture, directed her to humour the temper of the wanderer.

It was Ruth, in whose pale cheek and anxious eye all the intenseness of a mother's longings might be traced, in its most touching aspect. Though so lately helpless, and sinking beneath her emotions, the sacred feelings which now sustained her seemed to supply the place of all other aid, and as she glided past the listening circle, even Content himself had not believed it necessary to offer succour, or to interpose with remonstrance. Her quiet, meaning gesture seemed to say, 'Proceed, and show all indulgence to the weakness of the young man.' The rising discontent of Faith was checked by habitual reverence, and she prepared to obey.

"And what say the silly traditions of which you speak?" she added, ere the current of his dull ideas had time to change its direction.

"'Tis spoken by the old men in the villages, and what is there said is gospel true. You see all around you, land that is covered with hill and valley, and which once bore wood, without the

fear of the axe, and over which game was spread with a bountiful hand. There are runners and hunters in our tribe, who have been on a straight path, towards the setting sun, until their legs were weary, and their eyes could not see the clouds that hang over the salt lake, and yet they say 'tis every where beautiful as yonder green mountain. Tall trees and shady woods, rivers and lakes filled with fish, and deer and beaver plentiful as the sands on the sea-shore. All this land and water the Great Spirit gave to men of red skins, for ~~them~~ he loved, since they spoke truth in their tribes, were true to their friends, hated their enemies, and knew how to take scalps. Now a thousand snows had come and melted since this gift was made," continued Whittal, who spoke with the air of one charged with the narration of a grave tradition, though he probably did no more than relate what many repetitions had rendered familiar to his inactive mind, "and yet none but

red-skins were seen to hunt the moose, or to go on the war-path. Then the Great Spirit grew angry ; he hid his face from his children, because they quarrelled among themselves. Big canoes came out of the rising sun, and brought a hungry and wicked people into the land. At first the strangers spoke soft and complaining, like women. They begged room for a few wigwams, and said, if the warriors would give them ground to plant, they would ask their God to look upon the red men. But when they grew strong, they forgot their words, and made liars of themselves. Oh, they are wicked knaves ! A pale-face is a panther. When a-hungered you can hear him whining in the bushes like a strayed infant ; but when you come within his leap, beware of tooth and claw !”

“ This evil-minded race, then, robbed the red warriors of their land ?”

“ Certain ! They spoke like sick women, till they grew strong, and then they out-devilled

the Pequots themselves in wickedness, feeding the warriors with their burning milk, and slaying with blazing inventions that they made out of the yellow meal."

"And the Pequots! was their great warrior dead, before the coming of the men from over sea?"

"You are a woman that has never heard a tradition, or you would know better! A Pequot is a weak and crawling cub."

"And thou—thou art then a Narragansett?"

"Don't I look like a man?"

"I had mistaken thee for one of our nearer neighbours, the Mohican Pequots."

"The Mohicans are basket-makers for the Yengeese! but the Narragansett goes leaping through the woods, like a wolf on the trail of the deer!"

"All this is quite in reason, and, now thou pointest to its justice, I cannot fail but see it. But we have curiosity to know more of the great

tribe. Hast ever heard of one of thy people, Whittal, known as Miantonimoh?—'tis a chief of some renown."

The witless youth had continued to eat, at intervals, but, on hearing this question, he seemed suddenly to forget his appetite. For a moment he looked down, and then he answered slowly, and not without solemnity—

"A man cannot live for ever."

"What!" said Faith, motioning to her deeply interested auditors to restrain their impatience, "has he quitted his people? And thou lived with him, Whittal, ere he came to his end?"

"He never looked on Nipset, nor Nipset on him."

"I know nought of this Nipset; tell me of the great Miantonimoh."

"Dost need to hear twice? The Sachem is gone to the far land, and Nipset will be a warrior when the next snow comes!"

Disappointment threw a cloud on every

countenance, and the beam of hope, which had been kindling in the eye of Ruth, changed to the former painful expression of deep inward suffering. But Faith still managed to repress all speech among those who listened, continuing the examination, after a short delay that her vexation rendered unavoidable.

“ I had thought that Miantonimoh was still a warrior in his tribe,” she said. “ In what battle did he fall?”

“ Mohican Uncas did that wicked deed. The pale-men gave him great riches to murder the Sachem.”

“ Thou speakest of the father ; but there was another Miantonimoh ; he who in boyhood dwelt among the people of white blood.”

Whittal listened attentively ; and after seeming to rally his thoughts, he shook his head, saying before he again began to eat—

“ There never was but one of the name,

and there never will be another. Two eagles do not build their nests in the same tree."

"Thou sayest truly," continued Faith, well knowing that to dispute the information of her brother was, in effect, to close his mouth. "Now tell me of Conanchet, the present Narragansett Sachem; he who hath leagued with Metacom, and hath of late been driven from his fastness near the sea; doth he yet live?"

The expression of the brother's countenance underwent another change. In place of the childish importance with which he had hitherto replied to the questions of his sister, a look of overreaching cunning gathered about his dull eye. The organ glanced slowly and cautiously around him, as if its owner expected to detect some visible sign of those covert intentions he so evidently distrusted. Instead of answering, the wanderer continued his meal, though less like one who had need of sustenance, than one resolved to make no,

communications which might prove dangerous. This change was not unobserved by Faith, or by any of those who so intently watched the means by which she had been endeavouring to thread the confused ideas of one so dull, and yet who at need seemed so practised in savage artifice. She prudently altered her manner of interrogating, by endeavouring to lead his thoughts to other matters.

“ I warrant me,” continued the sister, “ that thou now beginnest to call to mind the times when thou ledst the cattle among the bushes, and how thou wert wont to call on Faith to give thee food, when a-weary with threading the woods in quest of the kine. Hast ever been assailed by the Narragansetts thyself, Whittal, when dwelling in the house of a pale-face?”

The brother ceased eating. Again he appeared to muse as intently as was possible, for

one of his circumscribed intellects. But shaking his head in the negative, he silently resumed the grateful office of mastication.

“What! hast come to be a warrior, and never known a scalp taken, or seen a fire lighted in the roof of a wigwam?”

Whittal laid down the food, and turned to his sister. His face was teeming with a wild and fierce meaning, and he indulged in a low but triumphant laugh. When this exhibition of satisfaction was over he consented to reply.

“Certain,” he said. “We went on a path, in the night, against the lying Yengeese, and no burning of the woods ever scorched the earth as we blackened their fields! All their proud housen were turned into piles of coals.”

“And where and when did you this act of brave vengeance?”

“They called the place after the bird of night; as if an Indian name could save them from an Indian massacre!”

“Ha! 'Tis of the Wish-Ton-Wish thou speakest! But thou wast a sufferer, and not an actor, brother, in that heartless burning.”

“Thou liest, like a wicked woman of the pale-faces as thou art! Nipset was only a boy on that path, but he went with his people. I tell thee we singed the very 'arth with our brands, and not a head of them all ever rose again from the ashes.”

Notwithstanding her great self-command, and the object that was constantly before the mind of Faith, she shuddered at the fierce pleasure with which her brother pronounced the extent of the vengeance that, in his imaginary character, he believed he had taken on his enemies. Still cautious not to destroy an illusion which might aid her in the so long defeated and so anxiously desired discovery, the woman repressed her horror and continued:—

“True—yet some were spared—surely the

warriors carried prisoners back to their village. Thou didst not slay all?"

"All."

"Nay—thou speakest now of the miserables who were wrapt in the blazing block; but—but some, without, might have fallen into thy hands, ere the assailed sought shelter in the tower. Surely—surely thou didst not kill all?"

The hard breathing of Ruth caught the ear of Whittal, and for a moment he turned to regard her countenance in dull wonder. But again shaking his head, he answered, in a low, positive tone—

"All;—ay, to the screeching women and crying babes!"

"Surely there is a child—I would say there is a woman, in thy tribe, of fairer skin and of form different from most of thy people. Was not such an one led a captive, from the burning of the Wish-Ton-Wish?"

“Dost think the deer will live with the wolf, or hast ever found the cowardly pigeon in the nest of the hawk?”

“Nay, thou art of different colour thyself, Whittal, and it well may be, thou art not alone.”

The youth regarded his sister a moment with marked displeasure, and then, on turning to eat, he muttered—

“There is as much fire in snow, as truth in a lying Yengeese!”

“This examination must close,” said Content, with a heavy sigh; “at another hour we may hope to push the matter to some more fortunate result; but yonder cometh one charged with especial service from the towns below, as would seem by the fact that he disregardeth the holiness of the day, no less than by the earnest manner in which he is journeying.”

As the individual named was visible to all who chose to look in the direction of the hamlet, his sudden appearance caused a general interruption to the interest, which had been so strongly awakened, on a subject that was familiar to every resident in the valley.

The early hour, the gait at which the stranger urged his horse, the manner in which he passed the open and inviting door of the Whip-Poor-Will, proclaimed him a messenger, who probably bore some communication of importance from the Government of the Colony to the younger Heathcote, who filled the highest station of official authority in that distant settlement. Observations to this purport had passed from mouth to mouth, and curiosity was actively alive by the time the horseman rode into the court. There he dismounted, and, covered with the dust of the road, he presented himself, with the air of one who had passed

the night in the saddle, before the man he sought.

“ I have orders for Captain Content Heathcote,” said the messenger, saluting all around him with the usual grave but studied courtesy of the people to whom he belonged.

“ He is here to receive and to obey,” was the answer.

The traveller wore a little of that mysteriousness that is so grateful to certain minds, which, from inability to command respect in any other manner, are fond of making secrets of matters that might as well be revealed. In obedience to this feeling he expressed a desire that his communications might be made apart. Content quietly motioned for him to follow, leading the way into an inner apartment of the house. As a new direction was given by this interruption to the thoughts of the spectators of the foregoing scene, we shall also take the

opportunity to digress, in order to lay before the reader some general facts, that may be necessary to the connexion of the subsequent parts of the legend.

CHAPTER XI.

"Be certain what you do, Sir ; lest your justice
Prove violence."

Winter's Tale.

THE designs of the celebrated Metacom had been betrayed to the colonists by the treachery of a subordinate warrior, named Sausaman. The punishment of this treason led to inquiries, which terminated in accusations against the great Sachem of the Wompanoags. Scorning to vindicate himself, before enemies that he hated, and perhaps distrusting their

clemency, Metacom no longer endeavoured to cloak his proceedings, but throwing aside the emblems of peace, he openly appeared with an armed hand.

The tragedy had commenced about a year before the period at which the tale has now arrived. A scene not unlike that detailed in the foregoing pages took place; the brand, the knife, and the tomahawk doing their work of destruction, without pity, and without remorse. But, unlike the inroad of the Wish-Ton-Wish, this expedition was immediately followed by others, until the whole of New England was engaged in the celebrated war to which we have before referred.

The entire white population of the Colonies of New England had, shortly before, been estimated at one hundred and twenty thousand souls. Of this number, it was thought that sixteen thousand men were capable of bearing arms. Had time been given for the maturity

of the plans of Metacom, he might have readily assembled bands of warriors who, aided by their familiarity with the woods, and accustomed to the privations of such a warfare, would have threatened serious danger to the growing strength of the whites. But the ordinary and selfish feelings of man were as active among these wild tribes as they are known to be in more artificial communities. The indefatigable Metacom, like that Indian hero of our own times, Tecumthè, had passed years in endeavouring to appease ancient enmities and to lull jealousies, in order that all of red blood might unite in crushing a foe, that promised, should he be longer undisturbed in his march to power, soon to be too formidable for their united efforts to subdue. The premature explosion in some manner averted the danger. It gave the English time to strike several severe blows against the tribe of their great enemy, before his allies had determined

to make common cause in his design. The summer and autumn of 1675 had been passed in active hostilities between the English and Wompanoags, without openly drawing any other nation into the contest. Some of the Pequots, with their dependant tribes, even took sides with the whites, and we read of the Mohicans being actively employed in harassing the Sachem, on his well known retreat from that neck of land where he had been hemmed in by the English, with the expectation that he might be starved into submission.

The warfare of the first summer was, as might be expected, attended by various degrees of success, fortune quite as often favouring the red men, in their desultory attempts at annoyance, as their more disciplined enemies. Instead of confining his operations to his own circumscribed and easily environed districts, Metacom had led his warriors to the distant settlements on the Connecticut, and it was

during the operations of this season that several of the towns on that river were first assailed and laid in ashes. Active hostilities had in some measure ceased between the Wompanoags and the English, with the cold weather, most of the troops retiring to their homes, while the Indians apparently paused to take breath for their final effort.

It was, however, previously to this cessation of activity, that the Commissioners of the United Colonies, as they were called, met to devise the means of a concerted resistance. Unlike their former dangers from the same quarter, it was manifest, by the manner in which a hostile feeling was spreading around their whole frontier, that a leading spirit had given as much of unity and design to the movements of the foe, as could probably ever be created among a people so separated by distance, and so divided in communities. Right or wrong, the Colonists gravely decided that the war, on their part, was just.

Great preparations were therefore made to carry it on, the ensuing summer, in a manner more suited to their means, and to the absolute necessities of their situation. It was in consequence of the arrangements made for bringing a portion of the inhabitants of the Colony of Connecticut into the field, that we find the principal characters of our legend in the warlike guise in which they have just been re-introduced to the reader.

Although the Narragansetts had not, at first, been openly implicated in the attacks on the colonists, facts soon came to the knowledge of the latter, which left no doubt of the state of feeling in that nation. Many of their young men were discovered among the followers of Metacom, and arms taken from whites who had been slain in the different encounters were also seen in their villages. One of the first measures of the commissioners, therefore, was to anticipate more serious opposition, by direct-

ing an overwhelming force against this people. The party collected, on that occasion, was probably the largest military body which the English, at that early day, had ever assembled in their colonies. It consisted of a thousand men, of whom no inconsiderable number was cavalry, a species of troops that, as all subsequent experience has shown, is admirably adapted to operations against so active and so subtle a foe.

The attack was made in the depth of winter, and it proved fearfully destructive to the assailed. The defence of Conanchet, the young Sachem of the Narragansetts, was every way worthy of his high character for courage and mental resources, nor was the victory gained without serious loss to the colonists. The native chief had collected his warriors, and taken post on a small area of firm land, that was situated in the centre of a densely wooded swamp, and the preparations for resistance betrayed a singular familiarity with the military

expedients of a white man. There had been a palisadoed breast-work, a species of redoubt, and a regular block-house to overcome, ere the colonists could penetrate into the fortified village itself. The first attempts were unsuccessful, the Indians having repulsed their enemies with loss. But better arms and greater concert finally prevailed, though not without a struggle that lasted for many hours, and not until the defendants were, in truth, nearly surrounded.

The events of that memorable day made a deep impression on the minds of men, who were rarely excited by any incidents of a great and moving character. It was still the subject of earnest and not unfrequently of melancholy discourse around the fire-sides of the colonists; nor was the victory achieved without accompaniments which, however unavoidable they might have been, had a tendency to raise doubts in the minds of conscientious religionists con-

cerning the lawfulness of their cause. It is said that a village of six hundred cabins was burnt, and that hundreds of dead and wounded were consumed in the conflagration. A thousand warriors were thought to have lost their lives in this affair, and it was believed that the power of the nation was broken for ever. The sufferers among the colonists themselves were numerous, and mourning came into a vast many families with the tidings of victory.

In this expedition most of the men of the Wish-Ton-Wish had been conspicuous actors, under the orders of Content. They had not escaped with impunity, but it was confidently hoped that their courage was to meet its reward, in a long continuance of peace, which was the more desirable on account of their remote and exposed situation.

In the mean time, the Narragansetts were far from being subdued. Throughout the whole continuance of the inclement season, they had

caused alarms on the frontiers, and in one or two instances their renowned Sachem had taken signal vengeance for the dire affair in which his people had so heavily suffered. As the spring advanced, the inroads became still more frequent, and the appearances of danger so far increased as to require a new call on the colonists to arm. The messenger, introduced in the last chapter, was charged with matter that had a reference to the events of this war, and it was with an especial communication of great urgency that he had now demanded his secret audience with the leader of the military force of the valley.

“Thou hast affairs of moment to deal with, Captain Heathcote,” said the hard-riding traveller, when he found himself alone with Content. “The orders of his Honour are to spare neither whip nor spur, until the chief men of the borders shall be warned of the actual situation of the colony.”

“Hath aught of moving interest occurred, that his Honour deemeth there is necessity for unusual watchfulness? We had hoped that the prayers of the pious were not in vain; and that a time of quiet was about to succeed to that violence, of which, bounden by our social covenants, we have unhappily been unwilling spectators. The bloody assault of Pettyquamscott hath exercised our minds severely—nay, it hath even raised doubts of the lawfulness of some of our deeds.”

“Thou hast a commendable spirit of forgiveness, Captain Heathcote, or thy memory would extend to other scenes than those which bear relation to the punishment of an enemy so remorseless. It is said on the river, that the valley of Wish-Ton-Wish hath been visited by the savage in its day, and men speak freely of the wrongs suffered by its owners on that pitiless occasion.”

“The truth may not be denied, even that

good should come thereof. It is certain that much suffering was inflicted on me and on mine, by the inroad of which you speak ; nevertheless, we have ever striven to consider it as a merciful chastisement, inflicted for manifold sins, rather than as a subject that might be remembered, in order to stimulate passions that, in all reason as in all charity, should slumber, as much as a weak nature will allow."

"This is well, Captain Heathcote, and in exceeding conformity with the most received doctrines," returned the stranger, slightly gaping, either from want of rest the previous night, or from disinclination to so grave a subject ; "but it hath little connexion with present duties. My charge beareth especial concern with the further destruction of the Indians, rather than to any inward searchings into the condition of our own mental misgivings, concerning any right it may be thought proper to question, that hath a reference to the duty of

self-protection. There is no unworthy dweller in the Connecticut Colony, Sir, that hath endeavoured more to cultivate a tender conscience, than the wretched sinner who standeth before you ; for I have the exceeding happiness to sit under the outpourings of a spirit that hath few mortal superiors in the matter of precious gifts. I now speak of Doctor Calvin Pope, a most worthy and soul-quieting divine ; one who spareth not the goad when the conscience needeth pricking, nor hesitateth to dispense consolation to him who seeth his fallen estate ; and one that never faileth to deal with charity, and humbleness of spirit, and forbearance with the failings of friends, and forgiveness of enemies, as the chiefest signs of a renovated moral existence ; and, therefore, there can be but little reason to distrust the spiritual rightfulness of all that listen to the riches of his discourse. But when it cometh to be question of life or death, a matter of dominion and posses-

sion of these fair lands, that the Lord hath given—why, Sir, then I say that, like the Israelites dealing with the sinful occupants of Canaan, it behoveth us to be true to each other, and to look upon the heathen with a distrustful eye.”

“ There may be reason in that thou utterest,” observed Content, sorrowfully. “ Still it is lawful to mourn even the necessity which conduceth to all this strife. I had hoped that they who direct the councils of the colony, might have resorted to less violent means of persuasion, to lead the savage back to reason, than that which cometh from the armed hand. Of what nature is thy especial errand ?”

“ Of deep urgency, Sir, as will be seen in the narration,” returned the other, dropping his voice like one habitually given to the dramatic part of diplomacy, however unskilful he might have been in its more intellectual accomplishments. “ Thou wast in the Pettyquam-

scott scourging, and need not be reminded of the manner in which the Lord dealt with our enemies on that favour-dispensing day ; but it may not be known to one so remote from the stirring and daily transactions of Christendom in what manner the savage hath taken the chastisement. The restless and still unconquered Conanchet hath deserted his towns, and taken refuge in the open woods ; where it exceedeth the skill and usage of our civilized men of war, to discover, at all times, the position and force of their enemies. The consequences may be easily conjectured. The savage hath broken in upon, and laid waste, in whole or in part, firstly—Lancaster, on the tenth,” counting on his fingers, “when many were led into captivity ; secondly, Marlborough, on the twentieth ; on the thirteenth ultimo, Groton ; Warwick, on the seventeenth ; and Rehoboth, Chelmsford, Andover, Weymouth, and divers other places, have been greatly sufferers, between the latter

period and the day when I quitted the abode of his Honour. Pierce of Scituate, a stout warrior, and one practised in the wiles of this nature of warfare, hath been cut off with a whole company of followers; and Wadsworth and Brocklebank, men known and esteemed for courage and skill, have left their bones in the woods, sleeping in common among their luckless followers."

"These are truly tidings to cause us to mourn over the abandoned condition of our nature," said Content, in whose meek mind there was no affectation of regrets on such a subject. "It is not easy to see in what manner the evil may be arrested, without again going forth to battle."

"Such is the opinion of his Honour, and of all who sit with him in council; for we have sufficient knowledge of the proceedings of the enemy, to be sure that the master spirit of wickedness, in the person of him called Philip,

is raging up and down the whole extent of the borders, awakening the tribes to what he calleth the necessity of resisting further aggression, and stirring up their vengeance, by divers subtle expedients of malicious cunning."

"And what manner of proceeding hath been ordered, in so urgent a strait, by the wisdom of our rulers?"

"Firstly, there is a fast ordained, that we come to the duty as men purified by mental struggle and deep self-examination; secondly, it is recommended that the congregations deal with more than wonted severity with all backsliders and evil doers, in order that the towns may not fall under the divine displeasure, as happened to them that dwelt in the devoted cities of Canaan; thirdly, it is determined to lend our feeble aid to the ordering of Providence, by calling forth the allotted number of the trained bands; and, fourthly, it is contemplated to counteract the seeds of vengeance, by

setting a labour-earning price on the heads of our enemies."

"I accord with the three first of these expedients, as the known and lawful resorts of Christian men," said Content; "but the latter seemeth a measure that needeth to be entertained with great wariness of manner and some distrust of purpose."

"Fear not, since all suiting and economical discretion is active in the minds of our rulers, who have pondered sagaciously on so grave a policy. It is not intended to offer more than half the reward that is held forth by our more wealthy and elder sister of the Bay, and there is some acute question about the necessity of bidding at all for any of tender years. And now, Captain Heathcote, with the good leave of so respectable a subject, I will proceed to lay before you the details of the number; and the nature of the force, that it is hoped you will lead in person in the ensuing campaign."

As the result of that which followed will be seen in the course of the legend, it is not necessary to accompany the messenger any further in his communication. We shall therefore leave him and Content busied with the matter of their conference, and proceed to give some account of the other personages connected with our subject.

When interrupted, as already related, by the arrival of the stranger, Faith had endeavoured, by a new expedient, to elicit some evidences of a more just remembrance from the dull mind of her brother. Accompanied by most of the dependants of the family, she had led him to the summit of that hill which was now crowned with the foliage of a young and thrifty orchard, and placing him at the foot of the ruin, she tried to excite a train of recollections that should lead to deeper impressions, and, possibly, by their aid, to a discovery of the im-

portant circumstance that all so much longed to have explained.

The experiment produced no happy result. The place, and indeed the whole valley, had undergone so great a change, that one more liberally gifted might have hesitated to believe them those that have been described in our earlier pages. This rapid alteration of objects, which elsewhere know so little change in a long course of ages, is a fact familiar to all who reside in the newer districts of the Union. It is caused by the rapid improvements that are made in the first stages of a settlement. To fell the forest alone, is to give an entirely new aspect to the view, and it is far from easy to see in a village and in cultivated fields, however recent the existence of the one or imperfect the other, any traces of a spot that, a short time before, was known as the haunt of the wolf, or the refuge of the deer.

The features, and, more particularly, the eye

of his sister, had stirred long dormant recollections in the mind of Whittal Ring; and though these glimpses of the past were detached and indistinct, they had sufficed to quicken that ancient confidence which was partially exhibited in their opening conference. But it exceeded his feeble powers to recal objects that would appeal to no very lively sympathies, and which had themselves undergone so material alterations. Still the witless youth did not look on the ruin, entirely without some stirrings of his nature. Although the sward, around its base, was lively in the brightest verdure of early summer, and the delicious odour of the wild clover saluted his senses, still there was that in the blackened and ragged walls, the position of the tower, and the view of the surrounding hills, shorn as so much of them now were, that evidently spoke to his earliest impressions. He looked at the spot, as a hound gazes at a master who has been so long lost as even to deaden his

instinct ; and, at times, as his companions endeavoured to aid his faint images, it would seem as if memory were likely to triumph, and all those deceptive opinions, which habit and Indian wiles had drawn over his dull mind, were about to vanish before the light of reality. But the allurements of a life in which there was so much of the freedom of nature, mingled with the fascinating pleasures of the chase and of the woods, were not to be dispossessed so readily. When Faith artfully led him back to those animal enjoyments, of which he had been so fond in boyhood, the fantasy of her brother seemed most to waver ; but whenever it became apparent that the dignity of a warrior, and all the more recent and far more alluring delights of his later life, were to be abandoned, ere his being could return into its former existence, his dull faculties obstinately refused to lend themselves to a change that, in his case, would

have been little short of that attributed to the transmigration of souls.

After an hour of anxious, and, frequently, on the part of Faith, of angry efforts, to extract some evidences of his recollection of the condition of life to which he had once belonged, the attempt, for the moment, was abandoned. At times it seemed as if the woman were about to prevail. He often called himself Whittal; but he continued to insist that he was also Nipsett, a man of the Narragansetts, who had a mother in his wigwam, and who had reason to believe that he should be numbered among the warriors of his tribe ere the fall of another snow.

In the meantime, a very different scene was passing at the place where the first examination had been held, and which had been immediately deserted by most of the spectators, on the sudden arrival of the messenger. But a solitary

individual was seated at the spacious board, which had been provided, alike for those who owned and presided over the estate, and for their dependants, to the very meanest. The individual who remained had thrown himself into a seat, less with the air of him who consults the demands of appetite, than of one whose thoughts were so engrossing as to render him indifferent to the situation or employment of his more corporal part. His head rested on his arms, the latter effectually concealing the face, as they were spread over the plain but exquisitely neat table of cherry wood, which, by being placed at the side of one of less costly material, was intended to form the only distinction between the guests, as, in more ancient times, and in other countries, the salt was known to mark the difference in rank among those who partook of the same feast.

“ Mark,” said a timid voice at his elbow, “ thou art weary with this night-watching, and

with the scouting on the hills. Dost not think of taking food before seeking thy rest?"

"I sleep not," returned the youth, raising his head, and gently pushing aside the basin of simple food, that was offered by one whose eye looked feelingly on his flushed features, and whose suffused cheek perhaps betrayed there was secret consciousness that the glance was kinder than maiden diffidence should allow—"I sleep not, Martha, nor doth it seem to me that I shall ever sleep again."

"Thou frightest me by this wild and unhappy eye. Hast suffered aught in the march on the mountains?"

"Dost think one of my years and strength unable to bear the weariness of a few hours watching in the forest? The body is well, but the mind endureth grievously."

"And wilt not say what causeth this vexation? Thou knowest, Mark, that there are none in this dwelling,—nay, I am certain I

might add in this valley, that do not wish thee happiness."

" 'Tis kind to say it, good Martha, but thou never hadst a sister !"

" 'Tis true I am all of my race ; and yet to me it seemeth that no tie of blood could have been nearer than the love I bore to her who is lost."

" Nor mother ! thou never knewst what 'tis to reverence a parent."

" And is not thy mother mine ?" answered a voice that was deeply melancholy, and yet so soft that it caused the young man to gaze intently at his companion, for a moment, ere he again spoke.

" True, true," he said, hurriedly. " Thou must and dost love her who hath nursed thy infancy, and brought thee, with care and tenderness, to so fair and happy a womanhood." The eye of Martha grew brighter, and the colour of her healthful cheek deepened, as Mark

unconsciously uttered this commendation of her appearance; but as she shrunk, with female sensitiveness, from his observation, the change was unnoticed, and he continued. “Thou seest that my mother is drooping hourly under this sorrow for our little Ruth; and who can say what may be the end of a grief that endureth so long!”

“’Tis true that there hath been reason to fear much in her behalf, but of late hope hath gotten the better of apprehension. Thou dost not well—nay, I am not assured thou dost not evil—to permit this discontent with Providence, because thy mother yieldeth to a little more than her usual mourning, on account of the unexpected return of one so nearly connected with her that we have lost.”

“’Tis not that, girl—’tis not that!”

“If thou refuseth to say what ’tis that giveth thee this pain, I can do little more than pity.”

“Listen, and I will say. It is now many

years, as thou knowest, since the savage Mohawk, or Narragansett, Pequot, or Wompanoag, broke in upon our settlement and did his vengeance. We were then children, Martha, and 'tis as a child that I have thought of that merciless burning. Our little Ruth was, like thyself, a blooming infant of some seven or eight years; and I know not how the folly hath beset me, but it hath been ever as one of that innocence and age that I have continued to think of my sister."

"Surely thou knowest that time cannot stay; the greater, therefore, is the reason that we should be industrious to improve—"

"'Tis what our duty teacheth. I tell thee, Martha, that at night, when dreams come over me, as they sometimes will, and I see our Ruth wandering in the forest, it is as a playful, laughing child, such as we knew her; and, even while waking, do I fancy my sister at my knee, as she was wont to stand, when listening to

those idle tales with which we lightened our childhood."

"But we had our birth in the same year and month—dost think of me too, Mark, as one of that childish age?"

"Of thee!—that cannot well be. Do I not see that thou art grown into the condition of a woman—that thy little tresses of brown have become the jet black and flowing hair that becomes thy years, and that thou hast the stature, and, I say it not in idleness of speech, Martha, for thou knowest my tongue is no vain flatterer, but do I not see that thou hast grown into all the excellence of a most comely maiden? But 'tis not thus, or rather 'twas not thus, with her we mourn; for till this hour have I ever pictured my sister, the little innocent we sported with that gloomy night she was snatched from our arms by the cruelty of the savage."

"And what hath changed this pleasing image of our Ruth?" asked his companion, half cover-

ing her face to conceal the still deeper glow of female gratification, which had been-kindled by the words just heard. "I often think of her as thou hast described ; nor do I now see why we may not still believe her, if she yet live, all that we could desire to see."

"That cannot be—the delusion is gone, and in its place a frightful truth has visited me. Here is Whittal Ring, whom we lost a boy ; thou seest he is returned a man, and a savage ! No, no ; my sister is no longer the child I loved to think her, but one grown into the estate of womanhood."

"Thou thinkest of her unkindly, while thou thinkest of others far less endowed by nature with too much indulgence, for thou rememberest, Mark, she was ever of more pleasing aspect than any that we knew."

"I know not that—I say not that—I think not that. But be she what hardships and exposure may have made her, still must Ruth

Heathcote be far too good for an Indian wigwam. Oh ! 'tis horrible to believe that she is the bond-woman, the servitor, the wife of a savage !”

Martha recoiled, and an entire minute passed during which she made no reply. It was evident that the revolting idea for the first time crossed her mind, and all the natural feelings of gratified and maiden pride vanished before the genuine and pure sympathies of a female bosom.

“ This cannot be,” she at length murmured — “ it can never be ! Our Ruth must still remember the lessons taught her in infancy. She knoweth she is born of Christian lineage, of reputable name, of exalted hope, of glorious promise !”

“ Thou seest by the manner of Whittal, who is of greater age, how little of that taught can withstand the wily savage.”

“ But Whittal faileth of Nature's gifts ; he

hath ever been below the rest of men in understanding."

"And yet to what degree of Indian cunning hath he already attained !"

"But, Mark," rejoined his companion, timidly, as if, while she felt all its force, she only consented to urge the argument, in tenderness to the harassed feelings of the brother, "we are of equal years ; that which hath happened to me, may well have been the fortune of our Ruth."

"Dost mean that, being unespoused thyself, or that having at thy years inclinations that are free, my sister may have escaped the bitter curse of being the wife of a Narragansett ; or, what is not less frightful, the slave of his humours ?"

"Truly I mean little else than the former."

"And not the latter," continued the young man, with a quickness that showed some sudden revolution in his thoughts. "But though, with

opinions that are decided, and with kindness awakened in behalf of one favoured, thou hesitatest, Martha, it is not like that a girl left in the fetters of savage life would so long pause to think. Even here, in the settlements, all are not difficult of judgment as thou !”

The long lashes vibrated above the dark eyes of the maiden, and, for an instant, it seemed as if she had no intention to reply ; but looking timidly aside, she answered in a voice so low that her companion scarcely gathered the meaning of that she uttered,

“I know not how I may have earned this false character among my friends,” she said ; “for to me it ever seemeth that what I feel and think is but too easily known.”

“Then is the smart gallant from the Hartford town, who cometh and goeth so often between this distant settlement and his father’s house, better assured of his success than I had

thought. He will not journey the long road much oftener alone !”

“ I have angered thee, Mark, or thou wouldst not speak with so cold an eye to one who hath ever lived with thee in kindness.”

“ I do not speak in anger, for ’twould be both unreasonable and unmanly to deny all of thy sex right of choice ; but yet it doth seem right that, when taste is suited and judgment appeased, there should be little motive for withholding speech.”

“ And wouldst thou have a maiden of my years, in haste to believe that she was sought, when haply it may be, that he of whom you speak is in quest of thy society and friendship, rather than of my favour.”

“ Then might he spare much labour and some bodily suffering, unless he finds great pleasure in the saddle, for I know not a youth in the Connecticut colony for whom I have smaller esteem. Others may see matter of approval in

him, but to me he is of bold speech, ungainly air, and great disagreeableness of discourse."

"I am happy that at last we find ourselves of one mind, for that, thou sayst of the youth, is much as I have long considered him."

"Thou! thou thinkest of the gallant thus! Then why dost listen to his suit? I had believed thee a girl too honest, Martha, to affect such niceties of deception. With this opinion of his character, why not refuse his company?"

"Can a maiden speak too hastily?"

"And if here, and ready to ask thy favour, the answer would be—"

"No!" said the girl, raising her eyes for an instant, and bashfully meeting the eager look of her companion, though she uttered the monosyllable firmly.

Mark seemed bewildered. An entirely new and a novel idea took possession of his brain. The change was apparent by his altering coun-

tenance and a cheek that glowed like flame. What he might have said most of our readers over fifteen may presume; but at that moment, the voices of those who had accompanied Whittal to the ruin were heard on their return, and Martha glided away so silently as to leave him for a moment ignorant of her absence.

END OF VOL. II.

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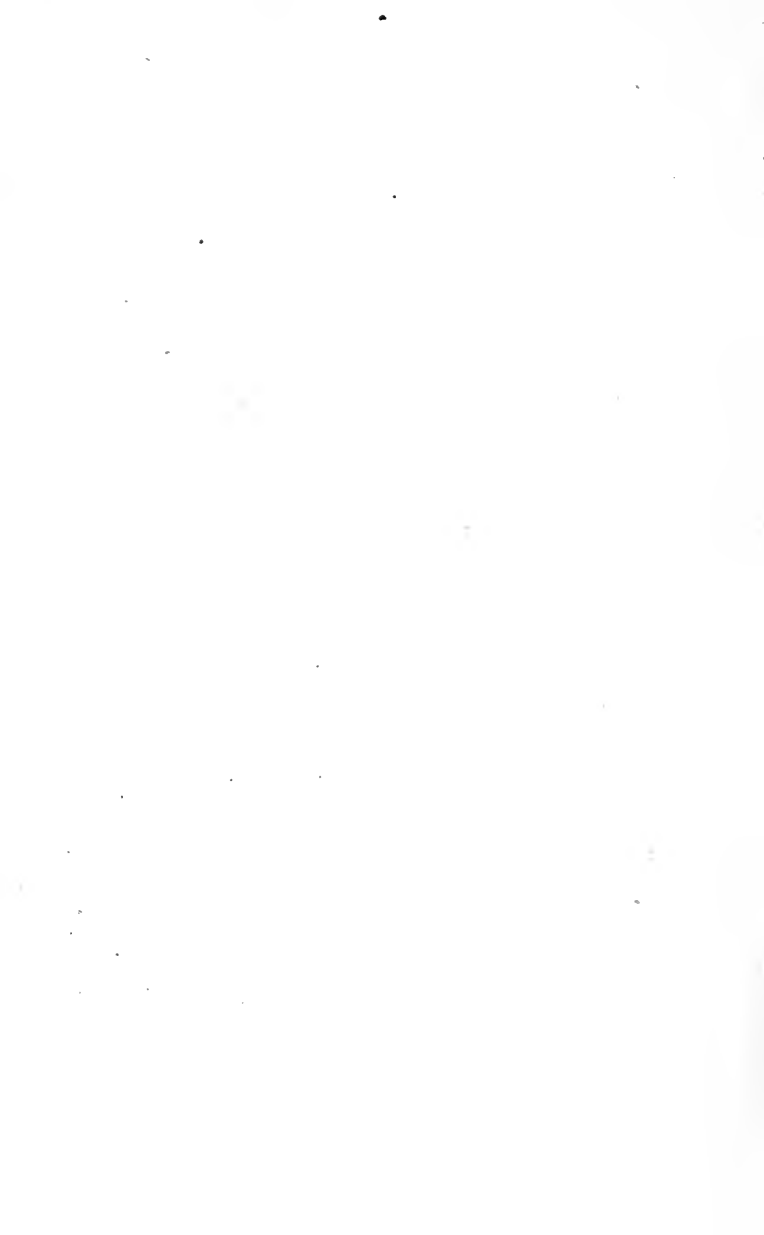
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